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* See page 83 - to - 152 inclusive

204
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THE PRACTICAL VALUE

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

Two Prize Essays

BY THE

REV. J. BROADHURST NICHOLS

AND

CHARLES WILLIAM DYMOND, F.S.A.

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PREFACE.

THE Donor of the Prizes which have been awarded to the following Essays, after exchanging ideas with many men in many lands, has arrived at the conviction that among the majority of intelligent educated laymen, there is no belief in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Of unbelievers, many continue in the observances of the Church, whilst rejecting its creeds, going with the stream to avoid the exertion of stemming the tide. Others, more honest or robust, still hesitate to openly proclaim their opinions, in doubt as to the effect of general scepticism on society. They argue that though the dogmas of Christianity are incredible, and, taken literally, absurd, the Church still exercises an influence for good among the ignorant and unreasoning. They

ask, what code of morality would remain if theology were rejected? What would take the place of Christian institutions in the social world? And many cogent arguments are adduced in support of the opinion that the results of universal scepticism must be disastrous. In hope of providing some guide for those interested in such inquiries, these Essays have been invited.

Those who read these two printed Essays will at least be able to appreciate the extent of the labour, gratuitous and self-imposed, incurred by the adjudicators in the perusal of fifty-five manuscripts of similar length.

T. A.

The Prospectus.

TWO PRIZE ESSAYS.

“ Assuming the Tenets of Christianity to be disproved, what would be the social and moral effects of the discontinuance of its teachings and the abolition of its institutions ? ”

Two Prizes of Twenty Guineas each will be given for the best Essays on the above subject. One to be from the Orthodox and one from the Sceptical standpoint.

CONDITIONS.

The Essays described in the above advertisement are not to exceed in quantity 75 printed pages of 300 words to each page, to be written on one side of the paper only, and to be accompanied by a short statement of the plan and arguments of the Essay. The Standard of Christianity to be taken is the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The Writers will use a special signature, enclosing real name and address in a sealed envelope, which will be opened only after adjudication. The Rev. Septimus Hansard,

M.A., The Rectory, Bethnal Green, London; and Clair J. Grece, Esq., LL.D., Redhill, Surrey, have consented to act as Adjudicators, with the Donor of the Prizes as Umpire.

The Essays to be addressed to Mr. Allsop, care of Trübner & Co., 57 and 59 Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., not later than the end of July 1887, marked on the packet "Essay." It is intended to publish both Essays, and to divide any profits of publication equally between the writers of the Prize Essays.

THE AWARD.

Two Prizes of Twenty Guineas each having been offered for the best Essays upon the subject following,—“Assuming the tenets of Christianity to be disproved, what would be the social and moral effects of the discontinuance of its teachings and the abolition of its institutions?”—one of the said Essays to be from the Orthodox and one from the Sceptical standpoint, under the conditions set forth in the printed prospectus, a copy of which is hereto annexed; and competition having been invited for the said prizes by advertisement: We, the undersigned, being the adjudicators named in the said prospectus, having perused the Essays which have been sent in under special signatures, pursuant to the said prospectus, and having carefully weighed the merits of each Essay, do hereby adjudge as follows; that is to say, we find that the best Essay from the Orthodox standpoint is that under the special signature of *Baroko*, and we find that the best Essay from the Sceptical standpoint is that under the special signature of *Judex*.

With the above adjudication our formal duty may be deemed to be accomplished, but we cannot refrain from overstepping the strict limits of the province which we have undertaken, in order that we may afford our testimony to the very high merit of many of the other essays, which caused us the painful reflection that, by postponing these to those to which we were constrained to assign the first place, we were inflicting, it may be, an acute disappointment upon competitors who had brought to their task mental powers of a high order, extensive erudition, and at the very least, a large measure of diligence and industry.

CLAIR J. GRECE, LL.D.,
Redhill, Surrey.

SEPTIMUS HANSARD, M.A.,
of University College, Oxford
Rector of Bethnal Green.

CHRIST OR CHAOS.

BY THE

REV. JOHN BROADHURST NICHOLS.

BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT.

The design of the Essay is to show that Christianity so pervades the life and activities of men, that its abolition would involve social confusion, moral deterioration, and, in some cases, the paralysis of movements which are now powerful in securing the progress of the race: and to show that there is no indication, in the thought of the times, that any substitute for Christianity is available, which could be an equivalent for the discarded faith.

The tenets of the standard are regarded as comprehended under three main heads: (1) Christianity as organised in the Church and its institutions: (2) Christ and atonement: (3) God.

With regard to (1) it is contended that the denial of the canonicity of the Scriptures would destroy their distinctive force: would involve the cessation of Christian propagandism by means of the pulpit and the press; would involve, in fact, the destruction of the Church with its auxiliaries; and this would have injurious effects upon the whole social and moral life of the community. The effects are specifically dealt with as regards home life, the exercise of philanthropy, and the social order. In each case it is shown that a ruling spirit, invariably working beneficially, would disappear.

It is contended also that the loss would be in the withdrawal of the "supernatural" element, which distinguishes

Christianity, and which could not survive it. The irritation, in modern sceptical thought, is against supernaturalism: the ethics based upon a supernatural revelation are declared to be bad. The only alternative is some form of Positivism. The logical outcome of Positivism, as indicated in recent Positivist teaching, is a fatalistic materialism. Under this head are considered the socialistic and altruistic equivalents for Christianity.

(2) The argument is that the disproof of the doctrines of "Christ" and "atonement" would mean (a) The denial of authority to the teaching of Jesus: (b) The surrender of the one actual human Ideal which men have recognised, and which has produced the noblest type of manhood yet realised: and (c) The collapse of the solution of the problem of evil and the mystery of earthly life which has captivated and convinced the world. This is generally considered, but with special reference to the dogma of human immortality.

(3) The disproof of the doctrine of God would lead either to Agnosticism or Atheism. (a) Agnosticism cannot be a final position. The existence of God might yet come within the sphere of scientific verification: if so, Agnosticism would be abandoned for a reconstructed Deism. More probably Agnosticism would lead to (b) Atheism, and a general Atheism would take the spirit out of scientific research, and would complete the moral ruin of the race, for there could be no worthy motives to heroic and self-sacrificing conduct under an Atheistic conception of life.

Conclusion. Wherein Christianity has been misjudged: wherein her hope lies; and wherein she precludes the success of any rival with her in the redemption of mankind.

ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY.

INTRODUCTION.

The assumption purely such.—Elimination of Christianity practically impossible.—History of controversy as affecting the position.—Definition of the proposition and of the scope of the inquiry.

I. Christianity as organised in the Church and its institutions.

General effect of abolition imagined.—Its bearing upon the moral cultivation due to the associations of Christian worship and the study of ecclesiastical art.—Discontinuance of Christian teaching generally considered.

1. "Disestablishment" of the Bible as the sacred canon.—
(a) The moral confusion that would follow upon the rejection of a generally recognised authoritative standard.—(b) The consequent cessation of "preaching" and Christian literature. The value of the result depends upon the "ethical" quality of Christian teaching. This discussed.
2. The issue is between Supernaturalism and Positivism. The overthrow of Christianity would involve the final overthrow of Supernaturalism.—(a) Removal of checks which Christianity has put upon conduct, and which have their peculiar force only as a "spiritual" element is admitted.—Objection that such restraints are due to superstition.—The "more excellent way" of Secularism.—(b) Removal of the guiding and con-

trolling force in positive morality.—The “Positivist” alternative would mean a movement towards grosser materialism. This indicated in Mr. Cotter Morison’s book.

More specific effects.

1. The Christian element in “home” life. Moral injury to the community if this were removed.
2. Philanthropy as affected—(a) In the practical manifestation of generosity; (b) as regards the “spirit” which evokes the noblest charity.—Charity as distinctively Christian.—“Altruism” proffered for the same ends.
3. The social order.—Christianity the ruling power in the social order.—The bearings of the law of Christian progress on the matter.—The “spiritual” element in Christianity as promoting social well-being.—This applied to all social relationships.—The common platform upon which all men meet destroyed with the denial of spiritual relations.—Social Democracy not an alternative. It has no future.—Mr. Champion’s lectures.—An estimate of the effect if Christianity, as a “supernatural” revelation, is disproved.—Altruism in Christianity.—Merely positive teaching inadequate.—Christianity and the Pessimism of the day.

II. Christ and atonement.

Fallacy—that it appears as though Christianity might flourish if doctrine of Christ, &c., were disproved. Vigorousness of churches (such as Unitarian) which deny “Divinity” and “atonement.”

General effect if Strauss or Renan had established his assertions.

1. Christ’s teaching discredited as authoritative. (This not further considered.)
2. Removal of a Personal Human Ideal. The value of such an Ideal. Impossible for any other man to occupy the position which has been accorded to Christ.

3. Collapse of the solution of the problem of evil by "atonement."—Involves the rejection of the postulates upon which human investigation of this problem has hitherto proceeded.—The trend of the great historic religions wrong if "atonement" is disproved.—One specific effect only considered.—Belief in human immortality and the inspiration due to it would be seriously affected.—Science and the assertion of immortality.—The "Rationalist" alternative to atonement. A blank outlook.

III. God.

The effect depends entirely upon the form of the disproof.

1. Agnosticism.—Cannot be the final position of searching, thinking men.—Might lead to a reconstructed Deism.
2. Atheism.—The state of things under Atheism.—The spirit would be taken from scientific research.—Science ever seeking to find God.—Ernest Naville quoted.—The moral effect of a prevalent Atheism.—Atheism has no positive teaching for the guidance of man.—Moral progress thwarted by the conditions of Atheism.

Conclusion.

Why has opposition to Christianity arisen.—The incongruity between her theory and its practical realisation.—This, with similar anomalies, the *ποῦ στῶ* for assailants.—Christianity and the lesson of her experience.—Dogma in relation to truth.—Her slender hold of men a consequence of her lethargy.—Is a substitute for Christianity imaginable?—An "intellectual" religion.—The hope of Christianity.

THE ESSAY.

INTRODUCTORY.

It must be premised that the position here taken up is purely "assumed." Presumably the writer from the "orthodox" standpoint is a believer in the Divinity of Christianity. Hence he cannot, except for dialectic purposes, admit that the tenets of his religion can be disproved. Were he to make such an admission he would thereby cut away the fundamental support of his faith. This is not an arbitrary, it is the only logical position he can take up, and in view of such a question as that before us, it needs to be emphasised. The Christian man reaches a condition of settled confidence in the Divinity of his faith: such a condition may be the result of a careful education in the tenets of Christianity from youth; or of a disposition of the mind which readily and conclusively accepts the Divine revelation contained in the Bible; or it may be attained only after each tenet has been submitted to the tests which the most rigorous criticism can devise, and has come forth from the ordeal "proved:" one way or another the Christian man who can give a reason for the hope that is in him has reached the point of settled conviction: he may abandon the position, but in so doing he abandons the only ground of sound faith; he is a Christian

logically only so long as he believes that his religion is Divine, and that by no possibility can its teaching be overthrown, or its progress thwarted. "Assuming the tenets of Christianity to be disproved" is, therefore, purely an assumption, as much so as would be the proposition, "Assuming the light of the sun to be extinguished, what would be the effect upon the solar system?"

And not only so. Quite apart from the Christian conviction that Christianity is Divine, and, therefore, unassailable, it must be recognised, upon general grounds, that the "discontinuance of its teaching and the abolition of its institutions" is, in the light of facts, not a practicable thing. We do not say that what appear to-day to be the most powerful supports of Christianity, may not, in course of time, be removed: that what seem to be its vital connections with humanity, may not lose their hold and wither: but we say that the phenomenon presented by Christianity is such, that we cannot imagine a state of things in which its teaching and institutions have become extinct. The ramifications of Christianity are so wide-spread and subtle that they find their way into every sphere and relationship of life: Christianity has operated so long, and so successfully, that it has not merely influenced men along certain lines of conduct; it has moulded after its own pattern the character of those individuals and communities who are the rulers of the world. Christianity is not simply *a force* which has been introduced into our nature, and which has become, so to speak, "naturalised:" it will be found, upon careful analysis, to be *the force* which is at the root—which is the vital centre—of all other forces which make for civilisation, and morality, and human greatness. But if the tenets of Christianity were "disproved," surely that would kill Christian activity of

all kinds, inasmuch as it would stop the supply of blood to the heart! Have not religions flourished more ancient than Christianity, achieving greater success, maintaining a firmer hold upon larger numbers of adherents, than it has? but the falseness of their assumptions has been exposed, and the mighty structures have crumbled and fallen with amazing rapidity! And would it not be so with Christianity if the scientific criticism of the future were compelled to reject the credentials it offers? Without doubt the disproof of our tenets would involve the overthrow of Christianity as such, but it would not, and could not, eliminate from the human heart, nor from human society, those activities which Christianity has introduced, and made an integral part of our nature; though such activities, independently of Christianity, would flourish in a lower, distorted, and possibly degraded, form. Is it not notorious that the Secularists and the Socialists make, as a radical tenet of their creed, the federation of the human race? And if the rancorous opponents of Christianity can plagiarise a germinal truth of the Sermon on the Mount, and set it, as the one point of light in their dreary gospel, is it within the limits of practicability that Christian teaching and Christian activity can disappear altogether from the face of the earth? It is possible to imagine Christianity, as such, abolished, but in other forms it must reappear as long as the heart of man retains its tenderer forces; it must be a power in society so long as the words "goodness," "nobility," "conscience," stand upon our vocabulary.

The history of controversy also reveals how purely our position must be "assumed." If any attack upon Christianity which has actually been made had proved successful, it would but have compelled her to shift her ground: it would not have been successful to the extent of entirely

destroying her life; and if such partial success had been followed up in other quarters, it is not easy to see how it could have done more than demolish particular assumptions; ultimately, if such successful attacks were sufficiently repeated, the last pulsation of Christian life would be stopped, and the dead body of the Church be buried from human sight. But so far as controversy in the past warrants us in speaking for the future, there is not a shred of evidence to render possible such a collapse; quite the opposite: the Christian man points triumphantly to the arguments which support his faith; to the fact that Christianity has so diffused itself and penetrated human society, that it is in the blood of man's moral nature: to the manner in which she has vanquished her opponents, and risen from the warfare inspired with new strength, and with loftier conceptions of the greatness of her mission; he points to this as he says, "The historical development of my religion will not allow me to admit the possibility of any such combination of circumstances arising, as would abolish the teaching, or the institutions, of Christianity."

Nevertheless there may be advantages from assuming that to take place, which the evidence at hand says cannot take place. If we suppose the light of the sun to be extinguished, and inquire into the probable consequences to our planet, it is quite possible our inquiry might lead to certain useful discoveries; and at least it would have the effect of showing us how beautiful and beneficent the sunshine is, and how all physical energy and life would be destroyed with it. And if there are those who are concerned to withdraw from amongst men the light of Christianity, it may help to reveal how essentially that light is bound up with human happiness, and the noblest inspirations to human conduct, if for

the moment we anticipate our opponents, and imagine their arguments proved.

The terms of our proposition need defining a little more strictly. For the purposes of this Essay the tenets of Christianity are to be regarded as embodied in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The disproving of such tenets, then, would mean the disproving of the Book of Articles. By which expression what are we to understand? It is obvious that to take other than general ground would be to involve ourselves in inextricable difficulties. We cannot regard the Articles as a sort of *legal* utterance, every word of which is of authoritative weight, and bind ourselves by the "ipsissima verba," as we should in the case of any statement of Christ's. Nor can we suppose that the disproving of some particular (though it may be generally received) interpretation of any Article necessarily disallows the tenet contained in that Article itself. *E.g.*, a large number of Christians have believed that the Third Article refers to the descent of Christ into a place of eternal perdition. Suppose the criticism of to-day to show that such is a false notion, and that Christ went amongst disembodied spirits, or simply into the grave: the Third Article is not disproved because an old and largely received interpretation of it has been discredited. If we are to apply hard and fast canons of interpretation to the Thirty-nine Articles, we are afraid we must grant that at any moment the tenets of Christianity may be disproved. Modern Biblical criticism uses a sharp knife, and with unsparing hand; the scientific spirit is rampant in her. Rightly so. Christianity submits with alacrity and joyfulness to any legitimate test to which she may be subjected: for she knows that only the accretions will be removed, whilst her truest life will be developed by

every advance in the thought and research of men. Augustinianism may perish : Calvinism may perish : Arminianism may perish ; but she remains, and her life is perennially healthy, because it is able to maintain a perfect correspondence with its environment. We thus regard the Thirty-nine Articles as the concise yet free expression of the radical truths of Christianity ; and if, as the result of any argument, men generally should come to consider that the evidence for these truths had been overthrown, the tenets of Christianity would be disproved. The specific truths involved will appear as we proceed.

Manifestly it would be impracticable to deal separately with these tenets, and to show what effects would follow upon the disproof of each. On the other hand, any attempt which lost sight of the individual doctrines, and treated the Christianity contained in our standard upon general grounds, could only result in vague and pointless statements. We propose to regard the Thirty-nine Articles as enunciating three principal or generic tenets : viz. (1) That as to Christianity as organised : (2) That as to the Christ and His work : (3) That as to God. The particular tenets contained in the standard will conveniently fall for consideration under these leading heads.

As far as possible also, only those effects of a disproved Christianity, which a general consensus of opinion might allow would take place, will receive attention. The strength of Christian conviction in a man might so colour, and even distort, his views of things as to lead him to imagine certain evils attending upon the destruction of his religion, which the sceptical man, with equally strong convictions against Christianity, could not admit would follow. Now no purpose could be served by the argument being carried to the doubt-

ful ground where prejudices become the principal antagonists. But there are certain phenomena before us which are distinctively and palpably produced by Christianity: which few, perhaps, would deny, would disappear with Christianity, and with regard to which the only question would be, "What was the social and moral value of such disappearance?" To these we endeavour to confine ourselves.

I. CHRISTIANITY AS ORGANISED IN THE CHURCH.

With the Sovereign's imprimatur went forth the Book of Articles in 1571, and with the Sovereign's imprimatur now goes forth the Repeal of the Book of Articles. As solemnly and publicly as those Articles were declared to contain the faith of Christian men, so solemnly and publicly are they now declared to be unworthy of any credence. Possibly this way of putting the matter may be objected to: it may be urged that the decay of Christianity would be gradual; that its doctrines and institutions would be relinquished one by one; that the credulity of religious enthusiasts would perish stage by stage: that it is not just, therefore, to argue upon an assumption which no man admits could be realised by a "coup de main." But our position is that Christianity has entirely ceased to be active amongst men, and we must be allowed to argue in the light of that bald fact, otherwise we, like our objectors, must fall back upon the probabilities of the case, and deny the possible elimination of Christianity by any means.

Learned men on this side have debated with learned men on that side: the doctrine of God, of God incarnate in Christ, of supernatural revelation, of inspiration, of the genuineness and authenticity of the Canonical Books, of the Person of

Christ, of sin, of redemption, of the sacraments, of the Church, of Christian ethics; each has been examined with the acuteness and learning which advanced scholarship can bring to bear upon it: there has been no indulgence given on behalf of tradition or the authority of Councils or Fathers: it has not been granted that a supernatural religion cannot conform in all points to the ordinary canons of criticism; everything has been subjected most rigorously to the scientific method: one by one the doctrines have had to go by the board: the "faith" of Christians is shown to have been a gigantic fraud: the documents upon which it is based have been exposed as spurious: Christianity has at last succumbed to the forces which have never ceased to assail her from the moment of her birth, and now is her degradation complete, and she numbered with the effete religions of history.

Perhaps the imagination may be allowed somewhat free play, in forming first of all a general notion as to what would supervene upon this collapse of the Christian religion. We are in London, let us say, on the Sunday morning. St. Paul's Cathedral bears upon its doors a placard announcing that it is "closed," or if that is not the case, we find that the building is being used for purposes very remote from any that Wren had in mind when he designed his masterpiece. A large number of persons are assembled to hear a performance of Berlioz's *Faust*; it is announced—why not! and why not from the lips of Mephistopheles!—that later in the day a high-class representation of "*Hamlet*" will take place, the Dean of Christ Church supporting the leading character. We meet with a similar condition of things at "the Abbey." A brilliant company are enraptured with Dr. —, who is giving an exquisite rendering on the organ of some airs from "*Lorely*," or "*The Bohemian Girl*," with

perhaps a selection from "Ruddigore" interspersed, preparatory to an address which Professor —— is about to deliver on "The discovered relation between phosphorus and thought." Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle—*mirabile dictu!*—is labelled "Olympia," and the spirits of Spartan mothers whisper to the spirits of Roman dames as they hover over its arena, "How marvellously history repeats itself!" At the British Museum the President of a learned Society is engaged upon a series of lectures upon defunct religious beliefs, and his special topic for the day is "The psychological basis of the Christian delusion." The churches and mission halls of the poor in East London are turned into so many satellites of the People's Palace, and are well supplied with newspapers, periodicals, chess-boards, billiard-tables, &c. At Buckingham Palace a State Ball is held, and at the Imperial Institute a Conference is called with the object of facilitating the spread of Buddhism as a religious narcotic for the upper classes; the roads and railways are crowded with the thousands who are pouring out to Sandown Park and Epsom: the Crystal and Alexandra Palaces announce the most celebrated Continental bands: and—let us complete the transmutation—at the Hall of Science a full band and chorus perform Handel's "Messiah!"

In the light of facts and tendencies around us, who shall say that such is not as likely an 'effect' of the abolition of Christianity as any we can imagine. It assumes only one thing—that men would demand an equivalent for the religious observances of the Sabbath. But such an assumption will not be disallowed! A blank day of rest—a day of monotonous parading of parks and picture galleries—when that which is conceived to be noblest in human nature is not exercised—when the finest buildings of our cities are lying in disuse,

is intolerable. Sound the death-knell of Christianity, and all its machinery, with all the material and intellectual forces which have sustained its life, must forthwith be transferred to other objects—and those objects, by the law of reaction, must be those widest removed from Christianity. There are persons who would probably point to the realisation of such a Sunday as a “consummation devoutly to be wished for;” to us it seems as though any little New Zealander, lighting on those days, might have reason to regard himself as destined to fulfil Macaulay’s famous vision.

Before proceeding to a more specific examination of this assumption, it will be well to notice the effect which the general disappearance of the Church and its activities would have upon the moral cultivation due to the associations of Christian worship and the study of ecclesiastical art. The associations of Christian worship are powerful in their influence upon character. Most men are susceptible to a peculiar charm about Christian churches. Hardly a poet or novelist but has his references to the “dim religious light;” to the reverberations of the organ as its music travels amongst the arches; to the ennobling effect produced by the study of ecclesiastical art as displayed in the architecture, windows, tombs, &c., of great churches. Only certain natures, perhaps, are capable of moral elevation by the associations of buildings like Westminster Abbey, yet the circumstances of Christian worship are so widely diversified that a corresponding moral elevation may be produced in other ways. To the typical English farmer like Martin Poyser, and to a nature as different from his as Adam Bede’s, the associations of their parish church are powerful towards moral cultivation. The furniture of the building, as solemn as it is familiar; the painted window placed there to the memory

of a Donnithorne, and which is a perpetual symbol of the glory of heaven; the brass candlesticks, suspended from a brass chain, inseparable in the thought of the worshipper from the vision in the Apocalypse: the recollections of festive and mournful occasions which cluster about the place: all these have a tranquillising and inspiring effect upon the sentiments, which is one of the moral agencies of Christianity. The Primitive Methodist, again, is susceptible to such an influence in his way-side chapel: there are no cathedral vistas, nor stained windows, nor marble tombs; but there is a sense of sacredness in stepping upon the cocoa-nut matting which runs along the bricked aisle: a stillness, a 'far away from the world' feeling, which belongs to the place: in summer a play of sunshine and shadow across from window to window, and in winter a warmth produced by the union of voices and hearts which, apart from any virtue in the message declared, are moral forces. Whether in the cathedral, or in the country church, or in the Dissenting chapel, the associations of Christian worship are as a voice appealing to the nobler part of our nature. It may be said that all men are not thus susceptible: that it requires the presence of a particular sentiment, and its cultivation, before the nature responds to such influences. Be it so. Then if Christianity does meet that sentiment and develop it, the abolition of Christian institutions would leave the character without this refining influence. Others might urge that though Christianity existed no longer the ennobling influences of its art would remain; the stained windows, the echoing music, the eloquent marbles, would all be there: the only thing that would be swept away would be the 'sentimentalism' which is due to superstition. Space prevents our answering this by more than a general sentence. The

Ikonoclasm of the fanatical Puritans in the time of Cromwell is not a very happy augury of what would take place if St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey fell into disgrace. We are not sure that the arches, and the windows, and the tombs would be allowed to remain. But that is not the point. Any force in these things tending to elevate the character cannot reside in the things themselves: it is a force which they possess by virtue of their association with Christianity, and when Christianity ceases they lose the charm and power with which she invested them. The sentiment in French human nature which expresses itself in decorating the statues of the Place de la Concorde because of that which they represent may, under other conditions, express itself in the destruction of those statues because of that which they represent. And the English sentiment which finds the means of moral culture in the surroundings of Christian worship because these surroundings *are* connected with Christian worship, might, if Christianity were flung from her eminence, rejoice to see the odious symbols abolished, for the same reason that they had been connected with Christian worship.

But this loss is insignificant when compared with that to which we now turn our attention—the loss, viz., which would follow upon the discontinuance of the teaching of the Christian pulpit and (what falls most naturally for consideration here) the Christian press. The vast machinery and varied propaganda of Christianity, as organised in the Church and its institutions, exist principally in order that the gospel may be brought into application with the human heart and conscience. And with remarkable efficiency is this end secured. From ten thousand pulpits men are declaring every week a distinct message which must be a mighty force in forming public opinion and in controlling human conduct.

In every conceivable kind of style—expository, argumentative, pictorial, hortatory—is this message rendered, adapting itself to the cultured and to the illiterate, as well as to all the gradations in men's capacity to receive truth which lie between the two extremes. This message comes with peculiar power because it is the enforcement of a Divine and authoritative rule of life. The tenet of Canonicity must have a moment's consideration.

The rejection of the Sixth Article, which asserts the canonicity of the Scriptures would, it is hardly necessary to point out, only affect the "value" of the Bible. No disproof, either of the Divine authorship of the Book or of its teaching, could obliterate the Book itself. The Bible would be (if the term is allowable) disestablished; it could not be destroyed. It must ever be in the hands of men for their study so far as they are disposed to study it: but no longer can it be looked upon as canonical. Criticism has shown that the Divine guidance given to the Great Synagogue is a figment: Wellhausen has convinced the world into accepting his views: the repulsed attacks of New Testament historical criticism have been repeated, and successfully; and men are compelled to receive the evidence as overwhelming that the canonical Books from Genesis to Revelation are no more Divinely inspired or Divinely compiled into the authoritative standard of human conduct, to which none can add and from which none can take away, than are the Books of Esdras, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Pilgrim's Progress, or the Paradise Lost.

Here then is the important fact, that though the doctrines of the Bible might still be studied and preached, the Bible would have lost its authority as a standard, and we must form our estimate as to the probable effect upon human

conduct. For the moment we look exclusively at the notion of authority or canonicity. Why have men so concentrated their gaze upon this—to all human appearance—incongruous and haphazard collection of writings? We are in the habit of saying that Hebrew poetry is so lofty in its simplicity and grandeur as to command our admiration: the sketches of character contained in the Bible are so vivid, natural, human, as to allure us into their study: the Scriptures are such a mine of wealth, as regards their history and teaching, that the spirit, in its eagerness for knowledge, is ever impelled to explore it. But is this an explanation of the reverent regard human beings have always felt towards the Bible? Not so, except partially. The Bible has held together, has seemed to men to be a harmonious whole, has wielded a power quite beyond that of the sum of all its parts, because it has been devoutly believed to contain the sole and authoritative declaration of the will of God. Remove the element of authority: say these books are to be valued simply at their historical and ethical worth, and the effect upon human conduct would be startling. There would be the same majestic story of Abraham; the same wonderful world of humanity in the Psalms; the same richness of imagery and outspokenness of truth in the prophets; but men would not read into them the same meaning, and consequently would not gather from them the same inspiration. A Bill that Parliament has “thrown out” is, in the estimation of those for whose benefit it was framed, a very different thing from a Bill which has become law. And a collection of Scriptures, which are but so many books calculated to instruct the mind and edify the heart, are essentially a different thing from the same books regarded as coming in their entirety from God, and as revealing to men His will.

Let it be remembered that we have not to argue how far freedom of view as to Revelation is allowable: we have to point out the effects which the abandonment of a prescribed view would occasion. We have nothing to say, therefore, as to the legitimacy of that kind of interpretation which rejects the Messianic element in the Psalms; which advocates the theory of the pseudo-Isaiah, &c.: but we do say that if we must relinquish any reference in those majestic words, "Lift up your heads," &c., to Christ, we have little interest in them in their application to the return of the ark; and if the plaintive lament, "He is despised and rejected of men," has no allusion to a suffering Saviour, it has scant charm as the poetic description of the sorrows of Jeremiah or of the exile. In like manner the whole of Scripture would lose its freshness, would cease to have living application to the heart and conscience of humanity to-day, if it were merely regarded as a collection of ancient writings from which men might extract just what inspiration they were able to assist them in the struggle of life. Somewhere—in the Tower of London, we believe—is preserved the Imperial standard yard measure. If that standard were destroyed, what should determine the accuracy of other yard measures supposed to be of precisely the same length? and were the canon, by any advance in criticism, destroyed as such, who should pronounce as to the standard of morals for human obedience? It is very easy to criticise an existing standard, and perhaps not difficult to devise another: but we must not forget that all civilised government is really based upon the moral standard contained in the Bible, and if this were dishonoured a confusion would arise which would create its own special difficulties. With tolerable unanimity men acquiesce in the teaching of the Ten Commandments, but we dare not contem-

plate the result if the idea of Divine authority were no longer to attach to that wonderful Law. It may be said, 'The Decalogue would still exist, and men could allow to it exactly the force they do now.' But suppose they did so—a doubtful supposition—it would only be because they were so disposed, and that would make the standard, as a law, ridiculous. The greater probability is, that men would feel acutely that they had been deceived in their Bible: that it had enforced upon them a law which, after all, had only a human history: perhaps they might discover that its great precepts were but adapted from the Egyptian "Book of the Dead:" and under any circumstances they could not accord to it more than a fraction of the respect which a duly authenticated and authorised law would command.

Surrender the notion of authority in connection with the Scriptures, and the method of moral instruction known as "preaching" would forthwith disappear. Of what use would it be to urge the principles of a law which had been dis-crowned of its most august qualification! of what use to appeal to men to keep from this, and to follow that, course of action if the appeal is not backed by a power which can rightfully command! of what use to speak of the nature and ends of sin and the nature and ends of righteousness—to stimulate flagging mortals to seek heaven and to make all their life here a discipline and a preparation for it, if such teaching is not warranted by its coming directly from God! All those moral forces—such as the sacraments, the "means of grace," &c. —which operate along a great variety of channels, and which are most powerful in determining the character of the community, would cease. Let us look at this point in its other bearing before asking as to the magnitude and value of its effects.

The Christian press has perhaps an even wider influence than that accompanying the "preached word." The number of "religious" books published is in excess of those in any other branch of literature, even including science and fiction. There are the Commentaries on the Scriptures in daily use, from those of the Fathers to those of Meyer and Lightfoot. There are the works upon particular portions of the Bible, into which are thrown the acumen and scholarship and experience of the most illustrious men our universities have produced. There is the body of divinity which in the form of Bampton Lectures and treatises on doctrinal subjects has so perfectly systematised Christian theology. There is the apologetic and polemical literature which Christianity is not ashamed to publish as showing the result of her controversies. There are the innumerable periodicals, reviews, newspapers, of a theological and practical kind, which seek to expound and enforce Christian teaching. There is the mass of publications which issues from the Tract Societies, and which, in a cheap and often gratuitous form, so widely disseminates the main principles of the Christian faith. Added to this there are the works which treat of Christianity in its historical, scientific, philosophical and ethical relations, and which form no mean part of its literature. In the light of what is thus indicated it is unquestionable that Christianity, with its present activity, has a firm hold upon the thought of men, and must have a powerful influence in directing their conduct, whatever social grade they may occupy, whatever sphere of activity they may fill. But the pulpit and the Christian press have ceased to be, and we are to state the effect.

The effect, in a word, would be such that the moral life of the community would be entirely revolutionised. That,

however, is not saying much. What would be the character of the revolution? would it be to the detriment, or can we conceive it to be to the advantage, of the truest culture of human nature? The answer to this question hinges entirely upon the ethical quality of Christian teaching.

Generally speaking, the destructive criticism has not found the task of disrobing the truths of Christianity of their *moral* virtue to be a congenial one. She has always felt safer and more successful in working along historical lines; but in our own age she waxes "very bold," and pronounces a stricture which, were it warranted, would compel us to answer our question by saying, 'The morals of Christianity are radically bad, and the sooner Christian teaching is discontinued the better for the true interests of mankind.' We hear it affirmed that a Christian man is called upon to sacrifice this world for one which "is to come;" he is not to "lay up treasure on earth" but "in heaven;" he is to "seek first the kingdom of God," &c. Such an attitude creates an artificial basis for conduct, and the morality depending upon it must be bad. Men should be taught that at least for the time being *this* world is their home: that therefore their hearts and affections should be centered upon its objects; that its pursuits and pleasures should absorb all the energies; and that any religion which undervalues the present, which draws the mind away from its exclusive and concentrated attention upon the duties of the life that now is, and specially any religion that holds out the unworthy motive of "reward" hereafter to the extent that the claims of this world are sacrificed and repressed, must be condemned as bad. Christ teaches that men must turn their eye to the future, and give up everything for the future, and such a basis of conduct must operate very injuriously upon the

performance of the serious duties of life, and must hinder the natural play and expansion of the best qualities of the being. No *régime* for the physical man is to be approved which does not the better fit him for correspondence with his environment, and no moral teaching can be commendable which does not, in like manner, fit its subject for correspondence with his *actual*, not prospective, moral environment.

Now a grosser misapprehension of the basis of Christian morality than this is not possible. By no legitimate construction of Christ's words can He be made to teach that man has any other course with regard to his present life than seriously and thoroughly to discharge its duties. It is not Christ who tells us to "sit and sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss;" it is not Christ who advocates monastic seclusion: Peter indeed wishes to build tabernacles and to remain upon the mountain, but Christ will not permit it, because at the foot of the hill is the lunatic child requiring His help. Christ teaches that even communion with the Eternal must not stand in the way of the performance of duty to suffering humanity: Christ Himself must ever be about His Father's business, and work *while it is day*. He *does* enjoin that a man shall fix his heart and hope in the eternal, but why?—not that he may ignore any obligation of this life, but that he *bring down* the forces of the Eternal to enable him the more efficiently to discharge his responsibilities here. The cardinal principle of Christian morality is, that a man needs something beyond his own wisdom and strength for the performance of daily duty, and the spiritual world is pressed into his service; and as for reward! it is the natural and necessary result—the fruit of—earnest service on earth for God and man; it is "according as His work shall be."

The false view of the nature and design of the Christian life thus sketched is held more or less by Socialists, Secularists, and Positivists. These reformers agree that the human race is a great brotherhood, and that the beginning, and continuation, and ending of each individual's duty, is the promotion of the common welfare. A man's religion is the discharge, to the best of his ability, of the obligations which this brotherhood entails, and any supernatural element in such a religion is confusing, unscientific, and injurious to its truest ends. As regards the results of the discontinuance of Christian teaching, then, the issue is plain; it is between Supernaturalism and Positivism—Positivism being made to stand for all systems of reform which agree in the formula, "*Réorganiser sans Dieu ni roi.*" To discontinue Christian teaching means to discontinue all teaching which claims for man a spiritual nature, which gives him a spiritual standpoint, and which endows him with spiritual powers to sustain him in life's battle, and this discontinuance would have the most pronounced and disastrous results.

It would remove the checks which Christianity has put upon conduct and which have always been powerful to restrain from evil. A distinguishing feature of Christian teaching is, that all human action must be regarded in the light of its spiritual relations and not simply as it affects man and man. In an act of injustice the offence is not only against the person who suffers the injustice; it is a transgression of the law of God. The law of the land may not be able to take cognisance of it, or the law of the land may pronounce upon it that it is not unjust, but that does not affect the Christian judgment. And hence it is a phenomenon by no means rare, that the civil standard and the Christian standard differ widely in their estimate of the same act. Clearly when a man accepts

the doctrine that he is subject to a law, other than that of his country, which is supreme, that law must largely determine his character and conduct. Christian men do not refrain from this and that act simply because the statutes of the realm enjoin them so to refrain: generally speaking, they will obey the law of the land, but only because the law of the land coincides, in their view, with the higher law which is authoritative. We have greatly admired those men who have placed themselves solitarily in antagonism to existing customs and laws because their Christianity, speaking through conscience, demanded it. We have seen that the fact of unswerving fidelity to the Divine law has given them a position of immense strength—a position from which it has been impossible to dislodge them, and to which they perhaps have gained round the whole nation. And on every hand the moral restraints which operate are those which Christianity imposes, and if Christianity became discredited they would cease to be effective. A person, *e.g.*, believes in the omniscience of God and in his accountability to Him; that belief restrains him from a secret sin he might otherwise commit; he will not perform the act because God will see him and hold him guilty for it. But let that person surrender this tenet, and he may commit and enjoy his sin and can in no sense be regarded as an offender. The Spartan doctrine that guilt lay in detection would be his. The law of the land can never be invested with the attribute of omniscience; can never be vigilant enough to detect all its offenders; can never make the attempt to look into motives. What then would be the unavoidable effect if the higher law ceased to be recognised? The most loathsome and pernicious forms of immorality are beyond the scope of statute law: no Act of Parliament can ever deal with anger, malice, uncharitable-

ness; with the drink crave; with the clamorous demands of the baser nature: it may deal with the offences against society which result from licentiousness, but with the underlying passions and appetites it is impotent to grapple; and yet, these are the most powerful, the most mischievous, and are precisely the forces to which the higher law addresses itself, and which, as a matter of fact most obvious, it is able to curb and conquer.

The ordinary objection to this is, that these so-called moral restraints are but due, as we have already intimated, to superstitious belief and trust in the supernatural, and are consequently artificial and unworthy. He who refrains from sin because he imagines the Eternal Eye is upon him, and because he fears penalty as the sure consequence of his transgression, is both cowardly and selfish, and the implication is, that if the Eternal Eye saw not, and the penalties no longer loomed in the distance, the motives to refrain from sin would be withdrawn, and the man would find nothing to prevent him giving his nature the reins. Quite so. This familiar objection to the intervention of the supernatural just brings out what we insist upon. The abandonment of the Christian creed *would* withdraw the motives which restrain from evil. Whether or not those motives are worthy is another question. It could easily be shown that Christianity does not teach that a man shall do or forbear anything because of a superstitious fear of God and penalty: that there is a practical Christianity around us which has grown immensely in vigorousness and beauty *because* it has relinquished the superstitious notions which so largely swayed the mediæval theology. But that is beside our topic. We but contend that the cessation of Christian teaching would withdraw motives which have

been powerful to keep men from evil, and if that is granted it is all that is required at the moment. The objector would show us a more excellent way, in the evolution of a high moral sense in the community ; in men so using the advantages of art, and science, and civilisation, as that their nobler qualities should be developed : and he would hope for a more majestic manhood resulting along these lines than Christianity had produced. Of course the "objector" would have his chance, as he has now : but it is only right he should be informed that his "more excellent way" is one which Christianity has always numbered amongst her methods ; and that she possesses with regard to it what he eschews—an external, omnipotent Power, directing the movements and intelligently working out the ends, which such evolution of human nature is imagined to seek.

2. Equally marked would be the effect upon positive morality. The Christian man not only refrains from evil : he binds himself to do that which is good and righteous : to love his neighbour as himself. And he declares that he receives light as to his duty and strength for its performance "from above." He lives by communion with Heaven : frequently he approaches God in a formal way, and by means of prayer "renews his strength : " by the stimulus of religious exercises and by virtue of the sacraments he receives the inspiration he needs for all duty ; and there is no obstacle he overcomes, no obligation he discharges, no progress he makes, the power for which he does not regard as Divinely communicated. This is a remarkable phenomenon, but it is witnessed in the Christian life ; certainly it should be seen in all who accept the Tenth and following Articles of the Church. The point upon which we must fix

our attention is the dependence of the human spirit upon the Divine Spirit : the recognition by man of his inability accurately to discern how he should or should not act, and the placing of his confidence in the God who made him. The teaching of Christianity is characterised by this tenet of human dependence upon the spiritual, and if the tenet be disproved, the relationship it affirms of course ceases to exist. And nothing short of the actual realisation of this could give us adequately to see how mighty had been the Divine help upon which falsely we had trusted ; how indispensable and powerful, both to restrain and impel, had been the 'spiritual strength' in times of adversity, affliction, bereavement, and all others in which the heart had been liable to succumb to the influence of adverse circumstances. It is difficult to see how the denial of intercommunion between God and man could be overcome—could be overcome, *i.e.*, without serious detriment to the moral advance of the race. The elements of the Christian doctrine are at least homogeneous, though the doctrine be disproved. The Christian man fixes his love upon God : God is his Father, and that explains the relationship of love : it explains also how love must operate towards assimilation to God : this, in its turn, furnishes the reason for love to one's neighbour, * since the neighbour, whoever he be, is a brother. Hence there is involved in the Christian doctrine the conception of a moral standard supremely noble, which must encourage the loftiest aims, and call forth the purest affections of the heart, and which must possess, as a '*sine qua non*' to its realisation, the privilege of communion with God and the advantage of His help. This doctrine is intelligible : each of its elements logically involves the rest, and the whole is consistent and

* 1 John iv. 20.

harmonious, necessitating, so far as it is carried out, the noblest culture of mankind.

It is a kind of teaching, sterile in comfort, which informs us that if we can no longer believe in our connection with the spiritual world we must coldly relinquish our hold of it: the bare contemplation of such an alternative almost leads us to hope that though the *fact* were disproved it might yet be possible to cherish the figment: for what should we have that could serve the purpose of the discarded doctrine?

The issue, we have said, is between Supernaturalism and Positivism. With the fall of Christianity would absolutely cease from the face of the earth all teaching claiming a supernatural basis, and it could never reappear. Positivism "must reign till it hath put all enemies under its feet," and Positivism, by its own application to itself of the law of evolution, must move from the abstract towards the concrete; must move, therefore, in the direction of a harder and more exclusive materialism. It is scarcely a guess—it is rather the indication of an existing tendency—that the surrender of Supernaturalism would drive men to the extremest opposite they could find. The expression has recently come into use, 'Agnostic Positivists.' It seems to us to express a contradiction in terms. How, in reference to the same facts, can an Agnostic be a Positivist, and how can a Positivist be an Agnostic? There are Agnostic Evolutionists, as distinguished from Atheistic Evolutionists on the one hand, and Theistic on the other: their position we can comprehend: but an Agnostic Positivist, who shall describe? The Positivism which must be the religion of the future if Christianity is abandoned must be a very positive Positivism. It must not be content with ignoring the existence of God and His gracious relationships with men: it must ignore

the fact of its own ignoring of God. We shall revert to this point in dealing with the doctrine of the Divine Being ; our contention here is that the disproof of Christianity would involve a reaction to the grossest materialism. Is not this tendency exemplified in Mr. Cotter Morison's "Service of Man" ? Canon Row makes the following statement with regard to that book : *—"According to his (Mr. Cotter Morison's) reading of that system (Agnostic Positivism)—a system which he cordially accepts—Theism, Christianity, and all the motives suggested by them, are delusions destined to pass away under the illumination of this gospel of divine humanity. The sooner we get rid of the idea of responsibility the better, for we are in no sense free agents ; but the good man and the bad man are such as the result of their birth and their education, and cannot help being what they are. Consequently all attempts to convert a wicked man from the error of his ways are so much lost labour." If this statement correctly reflects Mr. Cotter Morison's teaching, is not Mr. Morison leading Positivism along its true and logical path ? The Positivist cannot deal with mind except as a manifestation or modification of the physical activity of the brain : how then can he do otherwise than affirm that the will is not free : and how can he more forcibly and beautifully preach his gospel than by urging the most expeditious elimination of all forms of human character that are unworthy ? Those who raise their voices in condemnation of Christianity ; who speak of the cruelty and injustice which have marked its history : of the variety of conflicting interpretations of its teaching : of the startling contrast between its theory of life, and its life as practically realised : point out a state of things which, in all candour, we must admit to exist, but

* Letter to *Christian World* newspaper, June 1887.

which, we nevertheless say, was antecedently probable : viz., that Christian men only imperfectly reproduce their ideal. But such objectors must acknowledge that an approximate approach to the Christian standard has been made, and that even this approximate approach marks the highest point of human moral development yet reached : and if Christianity should be rejected they must be prepared to accept the bald alternative—a hard philosophy, which has no message of mercy ; no promise of future for those who have not been born under favourable physical conditions ; which but prescribes a struggle, of which the lord and guide is inflexible matter, and of which the goal is what it may happen to be.

But the destruction of organised Christianity would have more specific effects, and three of such we shall choose as being the most conspicuous and far-reaching.

(1) Abolish the activities put forth by Christianity and a mighty revolution in 'home' life would follow. At first sight it might appear that the home as we know it in its English ideal form is simply a development in the order of civilisation. And indeed we are not concerned to maintain that the beauty of our home life is due exclusively to Christian influence. There are forces working along lines quite distinct from Christianity which largely contribute to the perfection of our domestic happiness ; but it requires no argument to warrant the assertion that there is an element in the 'home' notion which the sum of those forces cannot account for. That element, we believe, is due to the presence of Christianity : with the disproof of Christianity it would, of course, disappear ; and we must attach due value to such a result.

Let there be pictured in the mind the Christian home and the home from which the influence of Christianity is

excluded; let the contrast between the two be fairly perceived, and we can then estimate the nature and magnitude of the forces withdrawn from society when Christianity ceases to be active. In homes where Christianity is denied acknowledgment there will be either domestic anarchy or some power dominant which is arbitrarily created. Nothing needs less proof than the statement that in England the exclusion of Christianity leaves the homes of multitudes without an adequate governing power. We deplore, as the most crying evil of our times, the drunkenness and the vice which prevail; we cannot but associate with them wretched homes, the absence of every true tie of affection, and the certain propagation of that poisonous life which resists the progress of the race. It is a certain fact that where Christianity is admitted there is no place for these evils; that the two are as impossible to harmonise or combine as light and darkness. We admit that there may be homes which are pure of such evils, in which the moral life of the household may be unexceptionable, and from which, nevertheless, Christianity is excluded: in such cases, as we have just stated, some other authority is recognised. What is it? The Christian home obeys the Christian law—a law which is regarded as of Divine authority, and which none of its subjects has power to bind or loose. The non-Christian home obeys a law; it maintains the harmony and order which involve law: What law is it? Possibly it will be found to be some application of the Christian gospel; if not, it must be a law which the home frames for itself, and which is binding only so long as its subjects choose to consider it so. The Christian home possesses these features which are not found in any home entirely free from the influence of Christianity: (1) a common submission, on the

part of all its members, to a higher law which dictates the rules of life: (2) the sustaining of all relationships and the performance of all obligations, under the influence of love: (3) the ennobling of every duty into a sacred and religious act: and (4) the ordering of the home life with a view to the cultivation of the character for eternity. These are purely Christian characteristics, and to no extent can they be adopted by non-Christians without a plagiarism, to the same extent, from Christianity.

The home, as a Christian institution, is an auxiliary to the Church, and it must afford very great facilities for the personal and specific application of the truths taught publicly; for the cultivation of individual piety; for the fostering of mutual affection and the tenderest graces of social life; and hence for making the best citizens. A man who uses the advantages of home life which Christianity bestows, and to which we have now referred: who conscientiously endeavours to carry out what he believes to be the behests of the Eternal: who brings all he does and thinks under the control of the queen-passion of the human heart; who performs everything as a sacred act—an act of worship to God; and who makes his whole life a course of discipline for vaster, immortal service; such a man must, in any political, or civil, or social sphere he fills, be powerful for good to the fullest extent of his capacity. Here again it will be thrust in our teeth that we talk pretty theory, and that Christianity, as practised, falls far below it. And here again we repeat the answer:—that we do not contend that the Christian man realises his ideal any more than any other man, or any other institution, realises its ideal (though for that matter society bristles with examples of Christianity asserting her supremacy); but we do assert that Christianity

prescribes such an ideal : that all her teaching is directed towards it, and all her forces tend to realise it ; and we do assert that the conditions favourable and essential to its accomplishment are those of the Christian home. We do not say that good citizens, good magistrates, good merchants, good statesmen, are not made except as the result of direct Christian nurture ; what we point out as a great social result of the abolition of Christianity is, that a means by which men are fitted, under the best possible conditions, and from the best possible motive, to do the greatest amount of good to the community, would be taken away. Other means of bringing about the same end, it might be contended, would remain ; still that which has been most successful in promoting the general well-being, and which has distinctly given to individuals, to public bodies, to cabinets, to sovereigns, a glory and a supremacy which before they did not possess, would cease to exercise its ennobling power. To a very considerable extent the tone of public morals is determined by the discipline of the home, and the tone of public morals is certain to be high if every family is, in the sense we have pointed out, Christian. Abolish what Burns so exquisitely describes in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," and you morally emasculate Scotland's sturdiest sons ; abolish from any Christian home the paternal control which is as the authority of God ; the mighty restraints which a mother's solicitude for the Christian welfare of her family creates ; the refining and elevating influences which the religious exercises of the family circle exert ; the lofty conceptions of life, and duty, and destiny, which the daily read Bible stimulates ; abolish all that is Christian from every home in England, and the injury in every place of eminence and trust would be incalculable.

(2) Let Christianity be abolished and we must at once set ourselves to devise a new '*modus vivendi*' for the philanthropic institutions of the land. Now in dealing with such subtle and pervasive forces as those under the control of the grace of Charity, it is manifestly impossible to form any reliable estimate of their magnitude; nay, the first law governing their operation is that the left hand is not to know what the right hand doeth. The statistics published from time to time afford ground to many good people for pessimistic moralisings. 'Ye Christian churches,' they say, 'compare the amount of money spent in one year in intoxicating drinks with the amount subscribed towards the maintenance of your missions and benevolent institutions, and hang your heads in shame.' We have no wish to discredit the very worthy mission which statistics are intended to fulfil, but a moment's reflection will convince us how unwarrantable it is to gauge the activity of the philanthropic spirit by the amount of pounds, shillings, and pence placed publicly at the disposal of Christian institutions. At the same time let it be observed, that the money so placed by no means warrants the sombre reflections to which reference has been made. If for an instant we think of the thousands of churches of all denominations in this land, each maintaining its clergyman or minister; each carrying on its various organisations; each contributing to the needs of its poor; if we think of the amount existing in the form of endowments; of the capital invested in buildings—cathedrals, churches, colleges, and other institutions under Christian auspices—and which, if Christianity failed, would represent so much wealth applied to other purposes, our gloomy moralisings as to the pecuniary force of Christianity will be rudely disturbed. If we think again of the indeterminate

amount bestowed in private charity—the friendly lift to a poor tradesman ; the sovereign, or crown, or copper, quietly slipped into the hand of an indigent man ; the subscriptions to hospitals, asylums, &c., the large sums spontaneously given when some public disaster occurs : the money applied to further the Temperance movement and other ameliorative institutions : the special charities of Christmas, &c. ; if we grant that these, though not exclusively, yet to a very large extent, are the expression of the Christian sentiment, we shall find the aggregate pecuniary power of Christianity to assume proportions which perhaps had not been grasped by the most sanguine of us.

But charitable gifts are only an accident in the exercise of the charitable spirit. There is a philanthropy—very vigorous, very salutary in its working—which never concretes itself in the coins of the realm, and which is not represented in any published statistics. There is a spirit of goodness which has no purse to draw upon, but whose deeds possess a virtue to brighten and uplift human life, and are performed with a self-sacrifice of which the generous gifts of richer men may know nothing. A noticeable feature of Christianity is that her power is largely independent of its material resources. We are sure that the money placed at her disposal furnishes no index whatever of her actual strength ; nay, we are sure that for the purposes of Christian extension the money there is may have very much more than its commercial value—the mite of the widow may be a greater gift than the gold of the wealthy. And the philanthropy which is not seen—which no statistics can represent—is a factor with which we must deal.

There is in the world much that might lead us to endorse the reflection of Hobbes, that men are naturally at war with

one another, and that each man's paramount duty is to fight and vanquish his neighbour. The baser, competitive, vindictive spirit is rampant, and finds play in all spheres of life, not leaving out of account the Church. But there are also great forces operating which tend towards the 'federation of the world.' There is the nobler, social, fraternal spirit, which is as powerful, though it may not strike us in being as prominent, as its more selfish rival. Deeds of kindness, deeds of neighbourly attention, deeds which involve sacrifice on the part of those who perform them : do they not form the basis of our most pathetic literature, and is not our land, despite its wickedness, flooded with them ? None will deny that this philanthropy does exist, and that it is the 'salt' of society ; the only question will be, 'To what extent is it distinctively Christian ?' We do not advance the absurdity that a man who has not embraced Christianity in one of its organised forms is incapable of brotherly kindness ; we do not assert that subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles is an indispensable condition of a generous character ; but we do say, that much non-Christian charity may be due, directly or indirectly, to Christianity ; and we do say that the most elevated, and far-reaching, and ingenuous form that philanthropy can take, is that which under Christianity it assumes, and which is inseparable from Christianity. Perhaps this will appear all the clearer if we turn again to our assumption. The Books of Homilies of course go when the tenets are disproved ; and so alms-giving and charity in general, cease to have the force which now they possess as Christian obligations. The teaching which commands them is discontinued—discontinued because it has become discredited. An ardent Christian might say, that one of the immediate results of such a state of things would be the stultification of

philanthropic activity ; and he would not be without strong grounds for his statement. We will not go so far in this paper ; but we must contend that if the pecuniary support which is given to charitable objects from a sense of Christian duty were withdrawn, the great charities of the land would be most seriously affected. There is not an hospital, or asylum, or home, supported by voluntary contributions, which would not at once have to reconstruct its whole management if an equivalent to Christian support were not immediately forthcoming. Such an equivalent, it may be said, would be speedily found. Well and good. Still it would have to be devised and organised, and we are not called upon here to assume that such alternative means exist potentially in the community. The charities of the land have originated with Christianity, and they now depend very largely upon the power which originated them to sustain them in their Christ-like mission. We must contend further, that the noblest element in the exercise of philanthropy would cease to exist, and the philanthropy that remained would be of a lower order, if the influence of Christianity were withdrawn. We have referred to the fraternal spirit which dwells in human nature—which is perhaps an integral part of the nature—and which indicates itself in the kindnesses that pass between man and man, and that contribute largely to the happiness and well-being of the community. There is no reason to suppose that the cessation of Christian activity would mean the cessation of these generous movements of the heart : no doubt neighbours would continue to be neighbours, and help each other ; no doubt the sight of grief and suffering would continue to move human pity ; no doubt the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind would continue to play its part ; the abolition of Christianity could

not involve the disintegration of human nature: but it would certainly mean that *a spirit*, which had been the life and glory of philanthropic activity, operated no longer. Christianity insists upon her members reproducing the mind, the motives, the aims, of her Master, who, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." She teaches that He looked not upon "His own things, but upon the things of others;" that He did not regard His equality with the Father as a prize to be clutched at: * that "it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren;" she teaches in a word that self-sacrifice—which is Love in one of its applications—must dominate in all the discharge of the duties of life. Christianity says, 'You may cast your gifts into the treasury, but that is not all: it is not the principal thing; for the mite of the widow may have an element superadded which shall make her to cast in "more than they all."' Christianity says, 'You may bestow all your goods to feed the poor, and even give your body to be burned, but for the special purpose I have in view it profiteth nothing if it be not the spontaneous action of Love.' Christianity distinguishes between the generosity of feeling which ordinarily is current and the self-sacrificing Love which is her own inalienable characteristic. The spirit which underlies all true Christian charity is a power in society whose ennobling force none can estimate. We believe it to be a very real thing, accomplishing real and stupendous results in social amelioration: "for Christ's sake" is a watchword that does not fail to evoke the enthusiasm of Christian people: it operates now as powerfully as it did, in another direction, under the persecutions of Decius and Diocletian: the same Christian principle which leads men

* Phil. ii. 6, οὐχ ἀπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο.

to suffer leads them to give ; it is to-day producing the most beneficent results in improving the condition of the vast populations of East London : it is at the root of nearly all the social improvements of our time ; and if, by any chance, Christian teaching should be discontinued, this spirit, paralysed, killed, as it must be, would leave the philanthropic activities it had energised in a flaccid and moribund state.*

Positivism crosses our path again : it tells us its name is 'Altruism,' and it begs us to receive it as a 'religion.' This "religion" (*sic*) is quite prepared to provide for the discharge of all social and other obligations ; and (as we have already seen it must do) without any 'superstitious' belief in supernaturalism. It is only necessary to make one observation in this connection : if Positivism were to supersede Christianity, it would, in so far as it carried out its motto, "*vivre pour autrui*," be a revival, and scarcely in another form, of Christianity. It is difficult to imagine a cooler plagiarism than the Positivist notions of Altruism are from the New Testament. Comte, as Canon Farrar shows,† was deeply imbued with the spirit of the "Imitatio Christi," and Dr. Congreve, one of the ablest exponents of the new religion, gives us the remarkable passage, "We accept ; so have all men. We obey ; so have all men. We venerate ; so have some in past ages and in other countries. We add but one term—*we love*."‡ With such Old and New Testament language before us as "Thou shalt love the Lord thy

* See Farrar, "Hulsean Lectures," 5th edition, p. 147, and note. 'Ἀγάπη was not used in the classics. Cf. also the different meanings of ἔρω in Liddell & Scott's Lexicon, to see how exclusively 'love' is a Christian revelation.

† Ibid., p. 144, note.

‡ Ibid., p. 205.

God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself:" and "Love is the fulfilling of the Law," we confess we regard Dr. Congreve's "added" element as partaking of the ludicrous. The fixing on to Positivism of an Altruistic arm is as clear a recognition as could be furnished or desired, that the world is not prepared to dispense with those generous activities which seek the welfare of the race: and Christianity solely has introduced, and made efficient, those activities.

(3) The abolition of Christianity would involve the overthrow of the existing social order. We almost refrain from entering the field here opened. Not only does it present a vast and difficult problem: but questions which to-day agitate men's minds are bound up with it to such an extent, that its fair consideration would require an examination into the whole subject of contemporary politics. We can do no more than glance at the general condition of things with which we are confronted.

The social system obtaining in this country depends, for its maintenance, upon the power of Christianity. This is a bold assertion, but it is one which facts warrant, and which they thrust prominently upon our notice. The tendency to construct a new social system is in approximate proportion with the tendency to reject Christianity. If we found a Christian man who could embrace the tenets of the Social Democratic Federation, or a Social Democrat who could accept the teaching of the New Testament, we should say, 'This is an anomaly. This man is a Socialist at the expense of his Christianity, and that man is a Christian at the expense of his Socialism.' No reflection is more palpably suggested, upon a comparison between Christianity and Socialism, than that the two obtain in the inverse ratio to each other: to the extent that Christianity is active Socialism

is discredited ; and to the extent that Socialism is active Christianity is discredited. The law of our own land is based upon the teaching of the New Testament, which teaching, as it bears upon the social order, finds expression in the Thirty-seventh and Thirty-eighth Articles, and in certain of the Homilies. Roughly stated, the Christian law provides, (1) That authority to rule shall be vested in the "powers that be;" (2) That due respect shall be paid to all persons having such authority; (3) That the various grades of social life shall be recognised; (4) That all men shall be at liberty to hold and enjoy their own property. To what extent this state of things may have been brought about by Christianity, we are not called upon to inquire. The question is, How far is the existing social order dependent upon Christianity, and how far would the existing social order be affected if Christianity were discredited?

Whatever the history of its development may be, the law of our land must be described as a law sustained and governed by Christianity. Even were the Commentaries of Blackstone but a free translation of the Institutes of Justinian—if British law were but Roman law under other conditions—yet at this moment the law is an exponent, more or less accurate, of Christian teaching. Christianity has not only a creative, she has an adaptive, force: she can take that which exists, and use and mould it according to her own will. The lyre in the hands of Mars, and the same lyre in the hands of Apollo, are two very different things. Circumcision, as a hygienic expedient amongst heathen tribes, and circumcision, as the distinctive mark of the chosen people, are not to be confounded as the same. And a system of laws depends greatly for its effectiveness to restrain evil and to produce peace and harmony, upon the spirit which is

behind, and which uses its machinery. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's," spoken by the lips of Christ, might evoke an obedience differing essentially from that which would follow upon the same command from the lips of Herod. The laws of England controlled by Christianity, are not as the same laws when fulminated from the Senate. The influence of the Church in the Councils of the nation has been so great, the sentiment of the people has been so overwhelmingly Christian, that the law of the land has become permeated with Christianity; to such an extent, in fact, that it is one of the forces of Christianity—"a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to those that do well." One needs only to glance over the Statute Book to see that reforms and enactments are generally along the line of Christian progress; and he need only appeal to his own observation and experience, to find that in any great national question, Christian sentiment is the determining factor. "A straw shows which way the wind blows;" and when a Government, strong in the consciousness of a great majority, finds itself defeated * because its minister stops short of the Christian demand for redress to the innocent who have been injured and are helpless, it is an indication that when circumstances call for it, the Christian sentiment is stronger than party, and stronger even than Law.

Now if the order of things is so largely under the control of Christianity, what would happen if Christianity lost this control? If Sovereign, Privy Council, Lords, Commons and people had to a man discarded Christianity, what would be the result? Would the social order be maintained at its present degree of excellence, or would it deteriorate, or would it be likely to advance in the direction of a nobler standard?

* As in the case of Miss Cass recently.

Perhaps the first answer that suggests itself is that the existing condition of things would *not* be seriously interfered with. A sudden reconstruction of the institutions and customs of society would not appear practicable to the most ardent revolutionist, and all that could be expected would be natural development, under the intellectual forces which might assume the leadership. But if this answer is to be regarded as the right one, it must be very carefully modified.

In one sense the growth of Christianity illustrates the manner of the growth of all movements which seek the social and moral education of the race ; but in another sense the law governing Christian progress is entirely exceptional. Christianity did not revolutionise, by drastic means, the social life of the world ; she did not insist, in her entry into Rome, upon the abolition of slavery ; she does not to-day anathematise and excommunicate the nations which profess allegiance to her, because they do not abandon the practice of war ; the Christian social life which obtains has been developed steadily and slowly by the natural activity of Christian principles ; and it must proceed in like manner to all the reforms it hopes to accomplish. And the principles which men might embrace in lieu of those relinquished with Christianity would have to commend and assert themselves under the same conditions. Viewed thus generally any new system would have just the same chance and advantages in propagating its tenets that Christianity has had. But there is this point of difference—that whilst Christianity gained impulse from those mighty movements with which she was brought into contact, and which expressed all that was noblest and strongest in heathenism, no substitute for Christianity could gain a similar impulse from the discarded faith.

Christianity incorporated the living teaching of Judaism ; all that was valuable in the Stoicism of Seneca ; the elements of truth and power which Eastern theosophies yielded ; and though this derived strength at times worked injuriously, as in the case of the Gnostic heresy, yet in the main it immensely helped, so far as human conditions were concerned, the development of truth and the extension of the gospel. So far as human conditions were concerned ! But the fulfilment of human conditions was but secondary. The real power of Christianity has been her dependence upon the spiritual ; she has grown, and flourished, and conquered, because she has rested upon the sympathy and omnipotence of her Lord. This is the unique element in her remarkable career. She has always been dependent upon an inspiration from the spiritual realm—from Christ Himself : if her heroism failed it was invariably because she withdrew her gaze from her Head ; and she has been enabled to achieve new conquests and to hold her power where she already possessed it only by virtue of the Divine stimulus she has thus received.

And it could not be said that any substitute for Christianity could lay claim to such advantages. As regards its promulgation the peculiar “genius” of the gospel has been that it has set itself in antagonism with nothing except evil ; but we very greatly misinterpret the spirit of modern opposition to Christianity if it is at all likely to adopt such an attitude towards its rival. That spirit is too decidedly opposed to the whole structure, methods, and ends of our faith to find in it anything conducive to the accomplishment of its own aims. Hence the tendency in any new social order would be in a direction and according to methods widely different from those followed by Christianity.

But more especially do we call attention to the *spiritual* element as affecting the Christian social order. Life is sacred, property is secure, interests are preserved, in Christian countries—in England, for example—because the Christian principle is strong enough, and general enough, to command it. Will it be contended that any strength of military control, any number of Acts of Parliament, could, of themselves, assure to us the safety and tranquillity which we enjoy, and which are not enjoyed, to anything like the same extent, by nations amongst whom Christian principles are not dominant ! It was remarked, in more than one daily paper, in connection with the recent ‘Jubilee’ procession to Westminster Abbey, that the perfect order and good nature of the populace were enough to excite the astonishment of some foreign princes. We vaguely explain such a phenomenon by saying that the English are a law-abiding people ; still more vaguely by attributing it to the peculiar qualities of our Teutonic nature. As though, forsooth, all Teutonic natures exhibited the same measure of respect for public order, or as though none *but* Teutonic natures were ever capable of it ! We correctly describe this phenomenon only when we say that the Christian sentiment of brotherhood has strongly laid hold of the English people, for it is the presence or absence of this sentiment, whether in Teutonic or any other natures, which accounts for the presence or absence of public decorum and good nature.

And this explanation may be applied to all social relationships. A satisfactory understanding between master and man is more frequently secured upon the ‘give and take’ principle—which is an ordinary application of Christ’s Golden Rule—than by any resort to ‘legal remedies.’ So also the classes stand on a better footing with regard to each

other according as they practise Christianity than according as they insist upon their privileges. By the Christian law "all ye are brethren," and "one is your Father which is in heaven ;" and this, in actual operation, equalises the whole race, and yet it recognises the various gradations of social difference. It asserts that only temporal expediency divides men asunder, whilst it admits that under existing circumstances such division is unavoidable : its tendency is to lead men into closer relations of affection towards one another, but it will not push its tendency along any course which involves unjust or artificial methods.

All Christians, we say, profess to be sustained in the exercise of their principles, by direct spiritual inspiration. Their kingdom "is not of this world," and weekly they meet in millions to "renew their strength" by seeking communion with God. We beg special attention to this, the real secret of the maintenance of social order, and which would at once disappear with the disproof of Christianity. The rich and the poor meet together in the house of God, and in that is an acknowledgment of their brotherhood : their duties one toward another are constantly being sounded in their ears as the Bible is read and applied. And the results are seen. It would be impossible for such a huge organisation as Christianity to continue its multiform operations, and its results be not seen. So far as peer and peasant, affluent and pauper, are brought together, it is Christianity that brings them together : so far as monopolies and pernicious class privileges are being abolished, it is Christianity that is abolishing them : so far as poverty is being mitigated, and temperance and thrift encouraged, it is Christianity that is the ministering angel : and Christianity is paralysed for this, her dearest work, the moment she ceases to recognise humanity as a great brother-

hood, dependent absolutely upon the mercy of an Eternal Father—the moment she becomes an ordinary philanthropic organisation resting solely upon human conditions and human strength.

The discontinuance of Christian teaching and the abolition of Christian institutions removes the one common platform on which men meet, and the bonds which hold them together, for there is no longer any house of God, nor periodical opportunity for impressing the duties of life : and this could not but affect men disastrously in all their relationships one to another, nor fail to undermine the bases upon which the fabric of society now rests securely.

If Social Democracy is the alternative the prospect is gloomy in the extreme ; at least it would be so if there was any likelihood of that movement commanding the attention of the nation. But we believe that Social Democracy has no future. Apart from its methods it is scientifically unsound, politically impracticable, and morally bad. Its programme can hardly be read without a smile, and it seems as though the more reasonable and politic men who have been enamoured of it are leaving it for less impracticable schemes. The lectures recently delivered by Mr. Champion in St. James's Hall (and Mr. Champion expounds Karl Marx) indicate a much more moderate manifesto than we have been treated to in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park. In these lectures* there is no reference to the abolition of the House of Lords or other "hereditary authorities:" the demand for 'nationalisation of the land' appears to be surrendered: the 'marriage' question is not alluded to. A Socialist's programme, with no reference to these radical points, is a sign of the direction of socialistic advance. To us it is a sign that

* We speak but from a newspaper summary.

the most clamorous agitation of our times cannot very long maintain its individuality—an individuality to which it has the solitary claim only because of the assertion of its wilder, impracticable schemes. At the proper time—in the natural order of her evolution—Christianity will redress all those wrongs, will achieve all those reforms, which a true Socialism demands, and in Christianity, and not in small cliques of agitators, must the hope of the poor and the oppressed be fixed. But we are forgetting our assumption.

It is of course futile to say what precise principles of social government would obtain if Christianity were disproved : but whatever they might be they could not command anything like the strength, and solidity, and security which, by virtue of Christianity, now characterise the social order. We will not instance the ‘Commune’ of France or the ‘Nihilism’ of the Continent as examples of what occurs when Christianity is spurned, because these anarchies are a reaction from a very corrupt kind of Christianity and so exhibit special features. But may we not come to a reliable conclusion, if we attach due importance to that element which all along we have emphasised? There is withdrawn with Christianity the influence of the spiritual, and that means everything—everything that can be placed above the laws which men frame for themselves.

As in the case of the individual so in the case of society, its well-being—physical and moral—can be preserved only as men are stimulated to follow certain lines of conduct and restrained from following other lines of conduct. The personal character must be cultivated : that which is strongest and manliest in the nature must be exercised : the welfare of the race must lie near the heart of its individual members : considerateness, kindness, sympathy, charity, must thus be

active : thrift, sobriety, intellectual and moral progress must be sought on behalf of those who seek it not for themselves ; and in every respect the interests of the whole community must be preserved and advanced by common consent and by mutual co-operation. All this is admirably secured when the Christian theory is accepted. Man is but a 'stranger and sojourner' upon the earth : he is here simply that, by the discipline and education of life, his character may be fitted for the service of the eternal sphere ; hence his paramount duty is the cultivation of the graces of an ideal manhood. But such cultivation involves the exercise of those qualities which seek the good of others—of all : hence an adequate motive for most fully securing the general well-being. It being postulated, also, that human wisdom and strength are insufficient for these things, there is reliance upon that Omnipotent help which is believed to be available. Withdraw the idea of probation, of the bearings of this life upon the eternal, of the nearness and freeness of Divine support, and what is left that can compensate for them ? What is there possible to the imagination that could stand as an equivalent for these spiritual forces ? Shall the contemplation of their confined flesh afford to men an inspiration for efforts to mould a noble character ? Shall the conception of a realised Utopia, in whose blessings they have no share, sufficiently stimulate them to seek its accomplishment ? Shall the ideal of eight hours a day smooth and well paid labour call forth that self-sacrifice without which, as all will admit, human amelioration is impossible ? The stale answer that strength of character and the exercise of public duties are noble '*per se*' and are their own reward, can only be regarded, by the human nature which knows itself—as the statement of one truth involved. Men need the support of hope : a

personal interest in that upon which they are engaged, if it is to command the full exercise of their powers. Such a need is supplied by Christianity ; in no sense does it furnish an unworthy motive ; and it is a force, adequate and efficient for all personal and public duties, which would entirely disappear if the Christian religion were overthrown.

It must be remembered also that the same spiritual element acts, in general society, as a corrective and re-vivifying power. The pessimism which is somewhat prevalent in our day yields unintentional but significant testimony to the value and necessity of Christianity. ‘Is not the progress of society downwards? Are we not moving very much along the lines of Rome as the Empire hastened to its destruction? The tendency of the populations towards centralisation : the artificiality and moral rottenness which are conspicuous in the life of the upper classes : the condition and prospects of the poor ; do they not forecast the future in gloomy colours?’ They would, if it were not for the corrective influence of Christianity. Christianity has had to deal with this state of things before—to deal with it when it had run its course and the disaster was complete : and from the elements of decay it evolved a new, vigorous, world-blessing society. It is not necessarily a reflection upon Christianity that the demoralising tendency should reappear and assert itself where she assumes to reign and in spite of her. Such symptoms as those referred to—superficiality, softness of living, &c.—are symptoms of a disease which would spread alarmingly if it were not for the antiseptic virtue of Christian sentiment, but which *cannot* overwhelm society so long as Christianity is vigorous. And so with regard to all forms of moral and social deterioration. It is Christianity which is the repressive and saving force : the greed of gain ; the indulgence of the passions ; the pro-

secution of sordid, selfish ends, would have their way if human relations with the spiritual world could no longer be affirmed to exist: the abnormal strain of political and commercial life which is so conspicuous to-day; which wrecks the constitution and eats away the soul, would multiply its victims beyond computation if the arm of the gospel were paralysed and men had to face the blank fact that here and now is completed their destiny.

Summarily, let the teaching which affirms our own impotence for the struggle of life, which points us to Heaven, and which brings the strength of Heaven down to sustain us here and fit us for everlasting service hereafter, be disproved, and we see no alternative but a stultification of the noblest impulses which sway human nature and conduce to human progress.

II. THE DISPROOF OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

The doctrine of the Christ occupies so important and unique a position in Christianity that it must have separate and special consideration. No fewer than fourteen of the Thirty-nine Articles present tenets which concern the Christ in His relation to man, and man in his relation to the Christ. The broad teaching of these Articles is that the Christ of the Gospels is the Son of God: that He is Eternal God Himself incarnated in our flesh: that by the work He wrought upon earth He made atonement for human sin: that His death and resurrection from the dead are historical facts: that men are born into the world in a condition "very far gone from original righteousness:" that they cannot by their own effort, atone for their past sins nor fit themselves for further righteous conduct, that God has a gracious

purpose to save men from the ruin in which their sin involves them: that this purpose is declared and accomplished in Jesus Christ Who is the only sinless man: that by virtue of what He has wrought men may be justified before God, may be forgiven the sins they commit, and may be actuated to perform good works: so that the race who were under condemnation are, through the merciful intervention of God in Christ Jesus, brought back to righteousness, and made heirs of everlasting life. Yet more generally the doctrines contained in these Articles may be stated thus: (1) The existence of sin in human nature involving certain penalties: (2) The inability of human nature to redeem and renew itself: (3) The efficacy of the work of Another—God Himself become man—in accomplishing what is needed. Now a hasty glance at the results of Biblical criticism might lead us to say that the disproof of this cluster of tenets would not seriously interfere with practical Christianity. If we had lived a century ago and had been asked our opinion as to the effects that would follow if critics on the Christian side felt compelled to surrender the great doctrines to which we have just referred, we should probably have said that if the surrender were general Christianity could not survive the shock: she would lose her distinctive features—nay, she would lose her life: she would perhaps spasmodically continue some of her activities for a time, but then would succumb to other civilising and educative forces. But we have lived to see the day when men who embrace the Christian faith feel called upon to relinquish these essential tenets, and the amazing thing is, the supposed disastrous effects have not followed. The Unitarian community—large, influential—which identifies itself with Christianity, and the character and deeds of whose members do not

strike us as being of a lower order than those of ordinary Christians, does not accept the Christ as a Divine Person. Christianity can evidently flourish in the form of Unitarianism apart from a Divine Head! The teaching in many of the Free Churches also is distinguished by disavowal of the doctrines of 'vicariousness,' 'original sin,' 'natural incapacity for goodness,' &c. : and yet we should hesitate to say that these Churches are one whit behind the most orthodox in their fidelity to the common standard and their embodiment of the common principles of Christian conduct. At least we are bound to accept the position that great freedom may be taken with the central doctrines of Christianity apparently without detriment to the tone and quality of the Christian life. And if we form our prognostications in the light of what we have now indicated, we may suppose that the tenets as to "the Christ" and 'atonement,' may be disproved, and yet Christianity find herself equal, by her adaptive power, to survive the loss.

The writer conversed a short time ago with a young man of distinctively Christian character, who was identified with a Christian church, and was an earnest worker in connection with its institutions. He did not accept the theory that sin could be expiated by a vicarious sacrifice; the ethics of atonement by substitution were bad, and so the doctrine of atonement was rejected. He had not sufficient grounds for believing in any hypostatic union of the Divine and human natures in the one Personality of the Christ, and so the ordinary theory of the Divinity was refused. He held that the 'Christ-spirit' was amongst men; that the Christ Ideal existed, and that the cultivation of that Spirit and the emulation of that Ideal were a truer and nobler means to the renewal of the nature than any obedience to a theology

determined rather by Eastern mysticism than by gospel fact. There is a subtle pantheism about this which is not easily dislodged, because it is permeated with some of the Divinest elements of our religion. This young man recognised a Divine revelation through Christ; a power of Christ to renew and mould his own spirit; an ideal in His character; recognised in his own way that salvation was through Christ; and though it might be said that he held these truths in a most distorted form, yet so mighty *is* Truth that even when cramped and warped and degraded it can possess and ennoble the nature. And so it may seem that we must pronounce very guardedly upon the effects which would attend upon the disproof even of these vital tenets. If we can point to communities of Christians whose zeal and service will bear comparison with those of any of their neighbours: if we can pick out here and there men who do not hold what we regard as the essentials of the faith, and yet whose nobility of character and Christian activity are unquestionable, are we at liberty to say that the general prevalence of their views would destroy Christianity? If any one of the well-known attacks of the century levelled against the Person and work of Christ had proved successful; if the 'legendary' or 'mythical' theory had established its assumptions: if Strauss or Renan had convinced us that Jesus was but the Galilean peasant they sought to make Him: if the "Tübingen School" had shown that Paul and not Christ was the author of Christianity, and that the writings of the New Testament were invented in the second century; if what is described as 'advanced' theology had, with regard to the atonement, so far asserted its claims as to command universal acceptance: would any or all of these combined have required us to say, "Christianity can exist no longer"?

Let us see. Despite the fact to which we have adverted—that there is a form of Christianity active which denies the doctrine of God incarnate in Christ, and the doctrine of atonement by the sacrifice of Christ, we are by no means warranted in asserting that such activity is at all related to the rejection of these doctrines. Quite the reverse. To the extent these cardinal tenets are abandoned to that extent Christianity suffers; and men and communities who are able to exemplify the Christian life and to perform Christian service, and who yet reject the Divine Christ and His atonement, are mercifully requited beyond their faith, and are sustained by virtue of the facts they ignore. Were a man to argue—and honestly believe in his argument—that the sun was not the centre of our system, nor the producer of light and heat; were he to declare that the glowing disc we see is but an atmospheric illusion, and that light and heat have a terrestrial origin; such a conviction in the man's mind need not prevent him from enjoying the full benefit of solar beams. This illustration is defective in that there is no connection between the bestowment of the sun's blessings and the opinions of individual men with regard to the sun, whereas there is a connection—and a causal connection—between the bestowment of Christ's blessings and the opinions and attitude of individual men as to Christ. But the analogy holds in this respect: that the virtue of Christ and His work are not confined to those who have correct views as to their nature—else where were the hope for men who have not embraced the faith?—but are extended liberally, universally, all men more or less participating in their efficacy. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, and the doctrine of atonement by the sacrifice of Christ, are so generally held amongst Christians, and have

such prominence and power in Christianity, that wherever Christianity in any form obtains, the influence of these central doctrines must be present. We cannot imagine the New Testament read, the character of Christ studied, men at all accepting Him as their Teacher and Leader, and the influence of His true Personality not to be upon them. This is a likely reason why there is much Christianity that is better than its creed. But there is all possible difference between the scepticism of *some* as to a fact, and the *disproof of the fact*: all the difference that there is between a man's saying, 'The sun does not exist,' and the actual removal of the sun from the heavens. This or that individual—this or that community—rejecting the doctrine of Christ, and the unchallengeable disproof of the doctrine of Christ, are not to be confounded. Now if we suppose because we see Unitarian churches exhibiting ordinary Christian activity that therefore, if all churches became Unitarian such activity might still be continued, we are confounding things which essentially differ. What is Christian in Unitarian churches is by virtue of those diffused influences of the nobler Christianity which they ignore:* and if all forces but those called forth by their own peculiar tenets could be excluded from Unitarian churches, Unitarian churches would fall to the level of ordinary philanthropic societies. If the whole of Christendom came, *as the result of a delusion*, to refuse to believe any longer in the doctrine of the Divine Christ or His atonement, it would still be an entirely different thing from the whole of Christendom waking up to the fact that it had been under a delusion all along, and that the Divine

* Such nobler influences pervade Channing. Are they not present also in the hymn, "In the cross of Christ I glory," which has a Unitarian origin?

Christ and His atonement were scientifically and conclusively proved to have been a figment. And so, had Strauss or Baur succeeded it would have meant more than a universal Unitarianism; it would have meant that the power which gives to Christianity cohesiveness and life was withdrawn. There may have been a Nazarene named Jesus who was crucified for his alleged misdeeds, but it is disproved that he was God, and that his work had any beneficiary virtue for the race: men may be sinners, under penalty, and incapable of justifying and amending themselves, but it is disproved that there is any ground for their hope of salvation in the work wrought by Jesus of Nazareth. The position then is not that men have given up belief in the doctrines relating to Christ, but that those doctrines have no foundation in fact.

Three principal effects would follow upon this disproof. (1) The teaching advanced by Jesus would become discredited as presenting an authoritative standard of conduct. This, however, we have already considered in its more general aspect, and we need not dwell upon it further. (2) Men would be compelled to relinquish the only perfect Ideal of humanity they have been able to discover; and (3) The solution of the problem of evil and of the mystery of our life on earth which has captivated and convinced mankind would collapse.

(2) The value of a Personal Ideal must not be underestimated; in the case before us its removal would mean a loss for which compensation was impossible. Standing as we do in the light of the supposition that the Christ of the churches never existed, we must, of course, disallow to the man Jesus perfection of character. And, doubtless, it would be exceedingly simple to show how the lapse of time, and the

growth of the conception of His Divinity, and the imagination of His fervent followers, had invested His human life with a dignity and glory to which it had no claim in fact. Once disprove the Divinity of Christ, once judge Him as a mere man, and He must cease to hold His position as an immaculate and infallible standard for the imitation of His fellows. The value of the Ideal depends upon the conception of the entire Personality. And though, if the Christ of theology were declared mythical, and the Jesus of history remained, we might still have the facts of His character, identically as before, yet the elements which made it supreme and beyond criticism would have disappeared: by no chance could a merely human being stand as the infallible and universally recognised model of what our nature ought to be.

Now however the millions of the civilised world came to regard the Christ as their Ideal—their Standard of comparison, their Model for imitation—is not to the point; they *have* so regarded Him, and have received the stimulus which such a relationship was capable of affording; under the huge misconception men have developed along the path of their noblest culture, the race has advanced towards the condition of things it most covets: the “man in Christ Jesus” is the man who cannot but be admired; the brotherhood of those in Christ Jesus is a brotherhood conducive to the highest form of social happiness. The imitation of Christ by His followers is in no mean sense the secret of the success of Christianity. Next to the element of faith—or more correctly as one manifestation of the activity of faith—in Him as a Redeeming Lord, the daily study of His character and the endeavour to “walk in His steps” have primarily produced that type of human development which

we describe as Christian. Jesus Christ is held to embody in concrete form what otherwise could only exist as an idea in the mind. He is held to possess all human excellences; to possess them with absolute faultlessness and virtue, and to possess them to the exclusion of every defect that could possibly attach to our nature. This Jesus Christ is a character in history whose deeds stand recorded, and whose qualities had full play and were fully tested. But He is not merely a character in history: it is held that He is God, existing eternally, and maintaining an active and unceasing sympathy with those who follow Him; and that it is the duty of all who do follow Him to mould their life after the example set them by Him. We may not assert that human nature demands a human Leader to its final destiny: but if human nature, to any considerable extent, has chosen and obeyed such a Leader, the present character of the race, the present direction of its progress, must be due very largely to His influence upon it.

The Christ Ideal presents these features which give it its peculiar hold upon men; that it is perfect—the possibility of limitation or defect in its excellences being excluded, *ex hypothesi*: that it is intelligible—revealed with a simplicity and transparency which enables any man, any child, to apprehend the elements of its beauty; and that it is communicable—so set before men as that they may compare themselves with it, and copy it, and by constant effort reproduce it in their own character. In this respect perhaps the disciples of Christ follow their Master “at a distance;” nevertheless Christ *is* the Standard of moral excellence and the Leader of moral culture, to those who accept His teaching; and the type of character which is recognised as more majestic, more in harmony with our views of what human

nature ought to be, than any other, is that which is directly copied from the pattern furnished by Christ.

But it is discovered that the Ideal is fictitious: Christians, after all, have been but Comtists in another form: they have been worshipping the idea of humanity; their perfect standard was purely subjective; and they must now take account of the fact that their great Example lacks the very necessary condition of being actual. Surely no unprejudiced person can reflect upon this demolition of the Christian Ideal without saying, 'It would be a disaster.' However men, thus deprived of their noblest means of inspiration, might seek to compensate for their loss, it is certain that no other *human* standard could be set up who could be regarded as perfect, and the unavoidable result of that would be moral deterioration. We might be reminded that we should still have the noble characters of history for our imitation, and that we could gather all needful stimulus from the study of their virtues, along with the very necessary checks and warnings which their accompanying weaknesses would afford. From Socrates to General Gordon we should find a galaxy of illustrious examples the study of whose biographies would enlarge our intellectual vision, and strengthen and develop our moral nature. But have we not now the same advantage? the fact of the Christ-Ideal being recognised as supreme does not exclude our obtaining all possible help from other men. Were the Christ-Ideal withdrawn, however, we should be denied the benefit of a 'criterion' which had enabled us to pronounce upon what we should accept and what reject in the examples of other men. The withdrawal of the Christ-Ideal would affect us also in that the proper balancing and the harmonious co-operation of all the qualities essential to human perfection could no longer be seen in one personality.

Which is of great moment: for the race must grow miraculously in intellectual power before it can study the heroes which a future Carlyle may immortalise so as to extract from the character of each its goodness and eschew its badness; and in such a way as that each exemplar shall have his proper position and influence—neither more nor less—in the development of a perfect moral man.

We hear it said that moral culture results from contact with men; that the discipline of life, the moral ‘struggle for existence,’ tends to secure our conformity to type: that the type can no more be regarded as embodied in any actual man than the ‘type’ of the rose can be looked for in any existing specimen of the flower, &c. We quite assent to this teaching so far as it accentuates the advantages of the friction of daily life; and as a means in the hands of Christianity we see it to be powerful in promoting the advancement of the race; but we must emphasise the importance of the fact that the disproof of the tenet as to a sinless Christ would remove an actual concrete Ideal that had proved adequate, and that no other concrete Ideal could possibly take His place.

(3) We are liable to be led into a labyrinth as we approach the consideration of the “work” of Christ. Questions as to how far the notions which characterise the orthodox view of atonement—such as substitution, the efficacy of the spilt blood, &c.—are imported from the theosophies and mystical religions of the East, obtrude themselves upon our notice. But we shall avoid bewilderment, and have a distinct issue before us if we keep in view the fact that we are dealing with a particular theory of atonement—viz., that declared in the Articles of the Church of England. The broad features of this doctrine have been already stated (p. 57), and we have simply to assume its disproof. Christ did

not make atonement for human sin, and any solution of the problem of evil depending upon the assertion that He did must be abandoned. The question of the origin and cure of evil has always been peculiarly fascinating : partly, perhaps, because of a morbid curiosity to know the story of our ruin ; partly because of the scientific demand for knowledge upon so important a subject ; and partly because the matter is so vitally bound up with the interests and destiny of the race. It is a fact that some elements of the Christian doctrine are found in most, if not all, of the great religions. In the rubrics of the Vedas, in the Thargelia and Lemuralia of Rome, in the obscene orgies of Phenician worship, in the sacrificial rites of Mexicans, South Sea Indians, British Druids, as well as in the intelligible ritualism of Mosaism, we have abundant evidence that human nature, almost universally, has acknowledged its consciousness of sin, of the need of propitiating the Divine Being, and, to a large extent, of the fact that sin is expiated by the sacrificial virtue of another than the criminal. We mention this, not to argue for Christianity, but to show that the theories of atonement contained in the great religions, must fall with Christianity. Just as the Bible story of the Deluge comprehends the main features—without their traditional absurdities—of the story of the flood held by most races of mankind, so the doctrine of atonement before us comprises and harmoniously combines the noblest elements of that belief which, in a distorted form, finds expression in the greatest religious systems of history. It is to no purpose to argue that the whole theory is the systematisation of a bundle of errors and misconceptions which, in some inexplicable way, have become lodged in the human mind ; nor that there are religions which only hold *some*, and not all of its essential elements : the argument is that so far as

we can see the belief of mankind articulated in its religions, we find that it has held, in some form, the theory which, in its completeness, is presented in the doctrine before us; and that if this doctrine be disproved men must face the awkward fact that the trend of the historic religions has been wrong, and that any new solution of the problem of evil must be upon postulates entirely different from those which have hitherto ruled human investigation.

The broad moral effects of this are involved in those which follow upon the discontinuance of general Christian teaching, and which we have already considered. But there is one specific effect which must not be unnoticed. The belief in immortality—incalculable in its influence upon Christians—is a tenet depending upon the doctrine of atonement. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the completing act of redemption; the ‘official sign,’ so to speak, that His work is accepted by Heaven.* And the resurrection of Christ involves the resurrection and consequently the immortality of all who are His.† Whatever precise theory a Christian holds—Universalist, Conditionalist, Restorationist—he regards his immortality as assured to him through the atonement of Christ. It does not follow, however, that the rejection of atonement would exclude the possibility of a doctrine of human immortality. We do not see why it should not lie within the range of scientific investigation to demonstrate that the existence of man, apart from his physical organisation, is possible and certain. Science cannot affirm—and does not affirm—that thought and the brain are identical, any more than (to use the Duke of Argyll’s illustration) that “electricity is identical with the tissues of a fish

* ὁρισθέντος . . . ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν. Rom. i. 4.

† Vide Homily on the Resurrection. No. xiv., Bk. ii,

because it is developed out of the battery of a torpedo or gymnotus.* It may yet stand, upon the showing of the coolest science, that the brain and the whole organism are but the instruments of *the man*, who is independent of all his physical functions. But we cannot imagine science pronouncing affirmatively as to the spiritual existence—its conditions and modes—which she may yet declare man to be. Take away the Christian doctrine and the outlook is absolutely dark, and the present moral value of immortality is destroyed. Nay, the assertion—and nothing more—in the name of science that man must survive the dissolution of his material frame, and live for ever, would madden him. What are the possibilities of the future? what relation with it has conduct here? Could he rest with the assurance that no answer to these questions was possible? Nay. Loudly, clamorously, would the man, enfranchised from his thralldom to matter, demand some positive doctrine with regard to the sphere before him. And science could not give it. And nothing but revelation can give it. We hazard the opinion that the advance of science will establish our relations with the spiritual world—will establish man's immortality. And what shall they do in those days who have no gospel, bringing "life and immortality to light"?† Science would find herself perplexed and thwarted for want of the revelation she had rejected.

To return to the general doctrine. Its disproof would mean that the moral life of men must be estimated by a new standard, and dealt with upon a new principle. What could it be? The tendency of thought in anti-Christian systems and amongst those who reject the atonement of Christ seems

* *Reign of Law*, p. 279, pop. edition.

† Lit. "shedding light (*φωτίζαντος*) upon life and immortality."

to indicate that the Rationalistic spirit would assert itself, with the Evolutionist philosophy pressed into its service. What sort of a remedy a Rationalism, having *carte blanche* to prescribe for human evil, might offer, we confess we are unable to say. So many are the fundamental points of difference amongst the leaders of Rationalistic thought that we can only conceive of a plurality of conflicting 'gospels' taking the place of the discredited one. There is a sort of revived Pelagianism which is somewhat popular, and if this were given a scientific basis, and were trimmed and curbed to be in harmony with the results of scientific research, it might make a decent substitute for the rejected doctrine. But could scientists be presumed to agree as to the *freedom of the will*? Here, surely would be a '*casus belli*' before a single postulate could be settled! And so wherever a starting point might be found the same difficulty would occur: the leaders of Rationalism are too heterogeneous a body to find anywhere common ground of agreement: the certain result of an opportunity given them to provide a substitute for the Christian doctrine of the origin and cure of evil would be a series of word-battles for the initial position—a strife which could only be ended by an apostle arising who could be accorded in the scientific world the authority to fix truth which Christ has held in the Christian world. And all the while that men and schools were contending as to data the mass of humanity would be driven to the practical espousal of a blind dualism—to a condition of things in which the fight would be between the good and the evil within them; and such dualism would be devoid of the distorted truths which even the Persian mysticism possessed, for there would be no 'Ormuzd' in whom the hope of the final triumph of good might be fixed. Nothing could

present a blanker outlook than the prospect of the spirit of Rationalism sitting upon the grave of Christianity, and urging her devotees to agree in publishing her gospel to the world.

III. THE DISPROOF OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

Believers in Christianity might submit to the discrowning of their Bible; to the abolition of the Church with all its auxiliaries; and even to the denial of the facts bound up with the Person and work of their Christ; and yet feel, so long as their God was left to them, the possibilities of their religion were not wholly destroyed. But if they can no longer hold their God, what shall the result be?

The effect of the disproof of the first Article would depend entirely upon the form the disproof took. If the position were that we could no longer affirm what the first Article states, we should arrive at Agnosticism. If, however, it were that we had evidence which compelled us to say, 'There is no God,' we should arrive at Atheism. And this is not a distinction without a difference. It is hardly correct to say of the Agnostics that they are Atheists under a less objectionable name, though it is doubtless true that numbers of Atheists take advantage of the more negative form of unbelief to shelter themselves beneath it. The Agnostic, in so far as he is Agnostic, makes no positive statement as to that which is beyond the sphere of scientific verification: in so far as he pronounces against the existence of God he becomes Atheistic. If the philosophy known as Spencerian were to become generally held, it could only mean that men found themselves *unable to affirm* anything as to the Being of God. Mr. Spencer admits that the "Unknowable Being" is known with absolute certainty to exist, just as, on the

other hand, he admits the abstract unthinkability of space, time, and other things of which we yet scientifically know something. Agnosticism, pure and simple, cannot be the ultimate and final position of any class of thinking, searching men: it can be but a temporary halting place, and its adherents must eventually leave it to traverse one of two roads. (1) If men relinquished belief in God upon purely Agnostic grounds, there would be hope for them; it would be possible that the growth of scientific knowledge might bring God more within the range of their investigation—might lead them, in time, to reconstruct the doctrine of God, as well as a new and (to them) more scientific natural religion. Pure Agnosticism might be abandoned for a revived theology, for there would always be some amongst its disciples, who would seek to discover the sun which gave them their light and life.

(2) But more probably Agnosticism would lead to pronounced Atheism. Accepting this alternative men are not only unable to assert that God exists, they are compelled, by the conclusive results of scientific research, to declare that He does *not* exist. The result cannot be presented in too naked a light. There can be no worship of the 'Unknown God;' no voice, in the wide realm of nature, speaking of a Creator, that can be listened to; no instinct, crying in the soul, "Oh, that I might find Him," which can be obeyed; the mist that shrouds the origin of things can upon no pretence be lifted to discover a Personal First Cause; hard science smartly reproves her children for every cry which speaks of their want of a Vindicator and a Father: science has finally and irrevocably given her dictum that there is no God, and the question cannot again be opened. A return to Theism, or even to bare Deism, is as impossible as a return

to the Ptolemaic theory of the universe. Should Atheism in this form become universal, we have no hesitation in saying it would eventually take the spirit out of scientific research, for all scientific research which is buoyant and eager, is stimulated by the desire to discover origins and ends; and this desire is sustained by that hope of success, which 'springs immortal' in the breast. Whilst science has theological antagonists—whilst she is engaged in removing the errors which have clustered round their beliefs—she is doing a noble work, and has everything to inspire her activities; and though apparently in conflict with religion, is really seeking with it the same glorious object. But let these antagonists all drop lifeless: let these questions, which undoubtedly give to science its zest, be robbed of their seriousness: let her coolly apprehend the fact that her gaze must be exclusively focussed upon the phenomena before her, and that by no possibility can she get beyond the discovery and co-ordination of physical laws, and her brilliant eye will become dim, and her hands will hang down in dejection. Science depends, more than some of her most illustrious sons are prepared to acknowledge, upon an inspiration higher than any of her problems can give—an inspiration which sustained her before she was fascinated by her theory of evolution, and which shall sustain her when the interest has passed from the question of evolution, to others upon which she advances—and that inspiration is the hope that she shall one day find her way into the presence of God, and worship Him with the "children which He hath given her."

The following passage will suggest an important application of our tenet upon which we are unable to enlarge. "All the founders of science have reasoned thus: the world is

harmonious, for there is but one God ; the laws of the world are simple, for God is sovereignly wise. Thus reasoned Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Galileo. Thus reason in our day three physicists who, more than any others, deserve the title of inventors or initiators : Fresnel, Ampère, and Faraday. They have all repeated : 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' and this belief has fortified their reason. There are Atheistic savants, I know ; there are but too many such ; but they are not initiators. Up to the present (let us not involve the future), Providence has not permitted that any of the great secrets of nature be revealed to a man without faith. The founders of our sciences have not been savants, *though* believers, nor simply savants *and* believers. Their faith has directly acted on the direction of their researches : it has inspired their genius : it has been one of the causes of their discoveries. Our science is therefore Christian in its origin, not that there is a direct connection between Christian dogma in its totality, and the systems of physics and astronomy : but because Monotheism has fortified and directed the reason, and because it was by the preaching of the gospel that Monotheism was established in the world.* M. Naville deals similarly with the influence of Christian conceptions of God on industry, and on philosophy and the arts ; but this must pass untouched. Very briefly must we inquire into the *moral* effects of universal Atheism.

Our space is so nearly exhausted that we must fix upon one general effect which would comprehend all others, and deal exclusively with that. The world is shut up within its own sphere, and all problems and all pursuits have their origin and end in the promotion of mundane well-being. This, as one element in the working of human destiny is

* Ernest Naville : "The Christ : " pp. 49, 50. English Translation.

right and noble: men are under the strictest obligations to direct their energies towards the solution of the difficulties, and the improvement of the condition, of their present life: but this as the first and sole mission of man is resented by every instinct of our nature. The surest result of a prevalent Atheism would be that man was reduced to moral indigence: living from hand to mouth, with no guarantees of present security, and absolutely no outlook for the future. Men who are Atheists may be as good men morally as many Christians; but then they are such under a Christian law: the heritage of Christian advance is unavoidably theirs: and—albeit without their consent—they are under Christian influences. But the general uprightness of individual Atheists is not to be taken as pledging the moral potentiality of Atheism. What has Atheism, of its own, to induce men to espouse it? Could Atheism claim for itself even publicity, if it had not Christian men to assail? The mosquito commands recognition as a disturber of human peace; but he is hardly known otherwise: and the hostility, bitter and virulent, of Atheism to Christianity, furnishes its primary claim to public regard. Thrown upon its own 'positive teaching what has it that can assist human advancement? A system of negations is impotent in any cause of progress; it must mean degeneracy. Men, in order to grow, must have distinct lines to traverse; distinct objects and a distinct destiny to secure: for after all, it is a pernicious fallacy to conclude that there is a necessary analogy between the laws of moral culture and those of physical evolution; in man the will must be the fashioning power, and the will must have steady, solid, infallible guidance. The Atheistic figment is that sound laws for the government of the life would result from the general advance of education, &c., but this

goes upon the assumption—which can by no means be allowed—that education, under Atheism, could advance. The growth of education is determined by the aims and hopes of the individual spirit; and there is nothing in merely mundane life that can sufficiently stimulate these. There are no aims, no hopes, seeking merely temporal well-being, which are calculated fully to exercise the noblest part of man: the sphere is too narrow: the object too indefinite, the personal interest too doubtful: and hence the intense individual concern for the general welfare which prevails when the notions of God and human immortality are present, would have no sufficient inspiration if these notions were excluded. Ask Atheism whence man came, and her lips refuse to move: ask her whither he is going, and she has no answer: ask her why *this* must be done and *that* left undone, and still she is silent: ask her what she means by conduct, character, moral progress, and she does not know. The eye of the Christian is bold to peer in every direction: he has a “key” for the interpretation of all nature: hence there is that freeness in the action of all his powers which means expansion: to him there is the Hand of the Eternal Father in everything, and He is leading His children to Himself. The brightening and vivifying influence of this conception is all-pervasive and immeasurable: but let the light from the everlasting be extinguished: let the “voice of the Lord God walking in the garden” be silenced: let the universe be but what it is at the moment: let the keen, heavenward eye be called to concentrate its gaze upon the present: and the moral ruin of the race would be complete. There would not be a consideration left calculated to induce men to seek other than their own ends, nor to seek *them* by other than the most expeditious and politic methods.

The gospel of Atheism is very brief: "There is no God, and you must make the best of what you are." And no South Sea Islander but would reject the message as an insulting rebuff to every demand of his nature.

CONCLUSION.

After all, is it within the range of possibility that Christianity should be withdrawn from human life? The question could never arise if the Christian Church had more unswervingly followed her own teaching. Christian men, as a rule, look without alarm at the assaults upon their faith; the history of the past gives them to see that if an 'attack' is successful, it but shatters accumulated errors, and so purifies and assists Christianity; whilst if it aim at the overthrow of her principles it never is, nor can be, successful. But there is one taunt which the enemies of the gospel delight to fling, and which Christians cannot regard lightly—viz., that there is a painful incongruity apparent between Christianity as a theory and Christianity as a practical religion. With all humiliation we must admit that the lofty standard of the New Testament finds actual embodiment in but a moderate proportion of those who profess to accept it; and this is a powerful factor in a true view of our question. The sting of the taunt is in the implication that the Christian theory is not possible of realisation: judged by its own criterion, "By their fruits ye shall know them," it stands condemned. But there are two things to be kept in mind in coming to a judgment on this point: (1) The inherent practicability of the theory; and (2) Human conformity to its demands. It stands to reason that no theory can be carried out if its subjects refuse its conditions: it

also stands to reason that the practice will fail if the theory is not sufficiently lofty. These are complementary necessities; and in their relation to each other they must be borne in mind. Now Christianity, in theory, meets every want—physical and spiritual—of human nature: her purpose, borne out in all her doctrine, is the ‘sanctification’ of man “throughout body, soul, and spirit.” The contention is this breaks down in practice. But it does not break down when the necessary conditions are observed: there are men who have moved the world by sheer Christian force; it only breaks down when men seem to be, and are not, Christians; and in such cases the stigma and guilt of their inconsistency can only recoil on the individuals themselves. The immense difficulties which lie in the way of human redemption should be remembered when Christianity is judged upon; and if they are it will not be thought a strange thing, either that her real progress should be slow, or that a large proportion of mankind should seek her blessings without agonizing at her strait gate.

Nevertheless this fact—that “Christian men” are often as selfish and vicious as those with no religious pretensions—has created a *ποῦ στῶ* from which the assailants of our faith vigorously ply their levers. It is not remembered that wherever Christianity has planted her foot individual and national progress has at once been accelerated; singularly enough, the glorious results of Christian work have been attributed to the advance in civilisation—as though civilisation could be anything but a result demanding an adequate cause! If such incongruities as that upon which we have dwelt (and amongst them must be included many theological notions which have ruled the Church) had never existed, it is doubtful whether any rival to Christianity could have had

more than the briefest tolerance. The Church has herself to thank, and not her gospel to blame, for the somewhat formidable array of her adversaries. Verily her foes have been "they of her own household." Humanity revolts at much that has been taught and done in the name of Christianity.

But the Church learns wisdom with experience. Hitherto she has expected too much from the world, as the world has expected too much from the Church. Each has been too rigid and uncompromising. The Church, at least, is making amends for this, and we are greatly mistaken if, to the extent she does so, she does not disarm opposition. Christianity, as organised, is submitted to human conditions; she must, therefore, allow her external development to be determined by such conditions, and not repeat her past mistake of confounding fixity of dogma with changelessness of truth. What that can be conceived of as promoting the physical, intellectual, or moral welfare of man is Christianity debarred from assisting? and what movement in any domain has she identified herself with, and not immensely helped? Mr. St. George Mivart, in the current *Nineteenth Century*,* tells us he can remain a good Catholic and yet accept those results of the destructive criticism which to most men of his persuasion, perhaps, seem the hardest Rationalism. Whether Mr. Mivart's position as a Catholic is defensible or not, Christianity is plastic enough to adapt herself to any circumstances in which she finds herself placed. If she could accept the scientific doctrine for holding which she had condemned Galileo, she can accept any scientific doctrine that is well attested. If she could build her Church of the fragments of the shattered Roman Empire she can construct

* July 1887.

a Utopia from any social ruin. If she could survive the lethargy, the cruelty, the perversion of her own truth, which so glaringly condemn her past action, she can survive any combination of forces which may array themselves against her.

True, she does seem to have but a slender hold upon the influential classes, and upon the very poor: but can any unprejudiced observer, who has in mind the religious condition of the land a century ago wonder at it, or say it was other than consequential. During the last few decades, however, the Church has grasped, as she never did before, the spirit of her Master; and nothing is more certain than that there is that vigour, and sympathy, and love, in all her movements for the salvation of men which—until she recedes from her position—will preclude any successful rivalry with her in the work of human amelioration.

Is there imaginable, at this moment, a substitute for Christianity? If there is, it must be an intellectual religion; one in which discovered facts and laws—physical and psychical—shall rule the views and conduct of men. But making due allowance for advance in education, and the growth of influences which develop and fortify the mind, is it at all likely that the British people could find a governing principle for their lives, a law for their conscience, national and individual, a resting place for their world-weary spirits, in any cold, crystalline system which might spring from a marriage between science and philosophy? Given such a 'religion,' could it exist without being reduced to systematic and authoritative form! Who should be its prophet, to formulate its tenets and interpret its teaching? who should incorporate the results of new researches? And who should supply brains to those who would otherwise be denied the comforts of their religion?

An intellectual system may take to itself great glory as an intellectual system, but the moment it assumes the control of human conduct it assumes functions for which it was never fitted, and which it can never discharge.

Surely it is time the world had learned the lesson of all its history—that the power which is to uplift men, must be exerted from *without* themselves! Well and good to say that Socrates and Plato failed in their method, but is method all in this problem? are the direction and measure of our growth to rest with the standpoint of a philosophy? Socrates and Plato were nearer a true solution than Comte: men must look upwards and not merely inwards; and however they may sneer at our vague words ‘supernatural,’ ‘spiritual,’ &c., they resist the whole testimony of history if they deny the necessity of a Divine revelation.

Christianity grows, and that which grows, lives. In the record we have of the superstitions and weaknesses she has outgrown; in the evidence we have of her presence and zeal in every noble movement to-day; in the signs there are that she has a human heart as well as a Divine Spirit; in all this we see the indications of her power ever to adapt herself to the problems of life, and ever to carry the race along with her; and we see a prophecy which is daily realising itself, in the words of her Founder, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”

CHRISTIANITY AT THE BAR.

BY

CHARLES WILLIAM DYMOND, F.S.A.

"Oh, how good it is to see with one's own eyes!"

—BÖHME: *Three-fold Life*, ch. vi.

"Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?"

"Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

—*Luke* xii. 57; *Matt.* xvi. 3.

"Validius est naturæ testimonium, quam doctrinæ argumentum."

—AMBROSE.

CHRISTIANITY AT THE BAR.

It were a hopeless task to attempt to give a definite answer to the question thus formulated, if its scope were not limited by some stipulation as to the meaning which is to be attached to the words "the tenets of Christianity:" for, in the absence of any common consent as to how the characteristic notes of that religious system are to be recognised, the Essayist, at the very threshold of the subject, would have been compelled to wander in a labyrinth of uncertainty, from which he could have extricated himself only by hewing his way toward a doubtful outlet. To certain minds, the whole of Christianity appears to be comprised in a single article of belief: others imagine that it can be identified with the tenets and practices of some one of the many sects of Christendom: while there are those who prefer to regard it as co-extensive with "the Church-universal." It is but a step—though a long one—to the conviction, attained by a growing number, who, ignoring every outward form and every creed, will only allow that it is to be found in the hearts of those who love to do good—the world over. How, then, could a reply have been given which would have been applicable to each and to all of these diverse positions? Clearly, if an intelligible conclusion is to be reached, some settled system of teaching, assumed to be representative of

Christianity, must first be postulated ; and, to this end, it has been prescribed that, for the present purpose, the Church of England shall be regarded as its exemplar. Although the vast majority of Christians would doubtless decline to accept this assumption, save for controversial purposes, there need be no room for misapprehension in reading the following pages, if it be borne in mind throughout that the qualifying clause is understood to be incorporated with the question in this, or in some equivalent form :—"Assuming the Tenets of Christianity," *as represented by the XXXIX. Articles of the Church of England*, "to be disproved," &c. ; and that, wherever Christianity is mentioned (unless the context plainly points to another sense of the word), it is fixed to this special application. Thus, our inferential forecasts must be regarded as touching Christianity itself (whatever that may be) only at those points in which it can be shown to be at one with the teachings and institutions peculiar to that Church. But while the treatment of the more abstract parts of the subject is thus restricted, a wider range may be taken in dealing with its experimental portions—with those instrumentalities, common to all the Churches, which aim at the promotion of a religious life.

At first sight, the basis of discussion seems to be one so well defined, as to admit of the presentation of a simple and straightforward issue : but on looking closer into the nature and drift of the problem, and observing the complexity of the data, and their general indeterminateness, it becomes evident that it is not, by any means, easy to satisfy all its conditions. Nay, farther, it is not too much to say that some of the conditions are so contradictory, and so mutually destructive, that it would be impossible to trace their alternatives, in a strictly logical manner, without incurring the

risk of a charge of inconsistency. For these and other reasons, the subject cannot be effectively treated, if the argument be made to turn mainly on particulars, whether of doctrine or of practice. Hence the investigation must generally be conducted on broad lines: and, while due attention must be given to such subordinate matters as are really pertinent to the inquiry, our chief solicitude must be to seize and examine the prominent positions.

Had it been practicable to take the Articles, with their details, separately, our task would have been accomplished in the most orderly manner;—*first*, by settling their real scope and import; *secondly*, in as far as might be possible, by giving definite forms to propositions antithetic to them; and, *thirdly*, by predicting the moral and social effects which might be expected to result from the supposed negation, emphasised by a discontinuance of church-observances. But this cannot be done without introducing many elements of confusion: and thus—with a view to the better development of our theme in those parts which admit of the arrangement—it will generally be expedient to intermingle these three stages, and to dispose of them *pari passu*.

To simplify the work, certain connected matters may be eliminated. For instance, it is clear that we are not now concerned to show whether these Articles do or do not represent the true values of the variable terms of that equation which, under many transformations, has been the expression of the Church's conception of the fluent form of doctrine and precept known as Christianity. Nor is it any part of our business to test the abstract truth of these tenets beyond the point at which they cease to be directly or indirectly involved in the regulation of human character and conduct. Nor need we contemplate a denial of neutral (indicative, per-

missive, or recommendatory) clauses ; or those of a negative character, the negation of which would imply the acceptance of tenets, and the adoption of practices, antagonistic to those which would result from the negation of some of the positive articles ; or, lastly, those which had but a temporary significance.

* The digest of doctrine and precept embodied in the *Articles of Religion* declares the authority of "Holy Scripture," and of three Creeds, known as the Nicene, the Apostles', and the Athanasian. It also prescribes the use of certain Homilies, as "necessary for the times" when the Articles were written : but, since these discourses, which form a goodly volume, are no longer read in the services of the Church of England ; and as, for the most part, they aim at the enforcement of a morality which is not peculiar to Christianity ; they seem to be rather outside the field of the present discussion.

Attention has been directed to the difficulties that would confront the writer who should attempt to frame a series of consistent conclusions from a detailed examination of all the particulars of the Christian scheme. For this very reason they cannot be treated as if they were inseparably united into a harmonious whole : though it would be an error to conclude that no such intimate relation binds together any of the parts of the complex system. Taking the Articles, however, as they stand, it is not easy to trace this relation of parts, because they are ill-arranged for our purpose ; are wanting in proportion, defective in orderly exposition, lacking in important particulars, while abounding in matter with which we have little, if any, concern ;—bearing witness, indeed, in almost every line, to the disturbing influence of the waves of religious thought in different ages, and of the

controversies of the time when the Articles were published.¹ This then being the case, it will be convenient to dissect and recast the essential portions of the Articles and Creeds so that kindred factors may be grouped, according to a natural subject-arrangement, in a *Conspectus* which, while it will greatly facilitate reference and verification, will, at the same time, indicate the general order in which it is proposed to treat the various parts of the problem.²

CONSPECTUS

OF THE XXXIX. ARTICLES, AND OF THE NICENE, APOSTLES',
AND ATHANASIAN CREEDS.

I. AUTHORITY.

(a) WRITTEN.

Authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. "We must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God:" for "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Thirty-eight books, forming the present Old Testament, and twenty-seven, forming the present

¹ Bishop Burnet, in his *Exposition of the XXXIX. Articles*, Introd., says:—"It had been an invaluable blessing, if the Christian religion had been kept in its first simplicity;" and if "those nice descantings, that were afterwards so much pursued, had been more effectually discouraged than they were."

² The sections which may be passed over, either entirely, or with scant notice, are enclosed by brackets. These will not be confused with the bracketed words interpolated by the writer to complete or elucidate the text.

New Testament, are reputed canonical. [Fourteen books, forming the Apocrypha, "the Church doth read for example of life, and instruction of manners : but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."]

(b) CORPORATE OR PERSONAL.

The Church. "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance."

Her authority, and its limits. "The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies ; and authority in controversies of faith : and yet it is not lawful for the Church, [as] a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written ;" nor, "besides the same, . . . to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation. Neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."

[*Errors of certain Churches.* (xix.)]

[*Fallibility of General Councils.* (xxi.)]

(c) CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

"*The three Creeds*, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed."

2. HISTORY AND PROPHECY.

The Fall, and the Gospel-story. (See *Original Sin*, and *The Son*.)

Resurrection of the body. "I believe in the resurrection of the body." At the coming of the ascended Christ, "all men shall rise again with their bodies."

The Judgment. "He [Christ] shall come, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead," who "shall give account for their own works."

3. THEOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS.

(a) GOD.

The Triune Deity. "There is but one living and true God, uncreate, everlasting, and incomprehensible ; without body, parts or passions ; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness : and, in unity of this Godhead, there be three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity ;—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

"*The Father Almighty*, maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible."

"*The Son*, . . . the Word of the Father; begotten from everlasting of [Him]; and of one substance with [Him]: by whom all things were made: who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven; and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary [as Jesus Christ], God and Man: God, of the substance of the Father; Man, of the substance of His mother; born in the world; in the truth of our nature, like unto us in all things (sin only except); so that two whole and perfect natures—the Godhead and Manhood—were joined together in one Person, never to be divided: equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood: one Christ, by unity of person, by taking of the Manhood into God: who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a [sole] sacrifice—a perfect redemption, propitiation and satisfaction—not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men: [who] went down into Hell; did truly rise again from death; and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith He ascended into Heaven; and there sitteth on the right hand of the Father, [as] the only Mediator between God and Man, until He return to judge all men—the quick and the dead—at the last day."

"*The Holy Ghost*, the Lord and Giver of Life, proceeding from the Father and the Son: very and eternal God."

(b) THE DEVIL.

(c) MAN.

"*Original Sin* standeth not in the following of Adam, . . . but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man; . . . whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness; and is, of his own nature, inclined to evil; so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit," . . . even "in them that are regenerated." This, having "of itself the nature of sin, deserveth God's wrath and damnation: although there is no condemnation for them that believe, and are baptised."

Dead Works. "Works done before the [reception of the] grace of Christ, and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither

do they make men meet to receive grace. . . ; for, [as] they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."

Justification. "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, by faith ; and not for our own works or deservings."

Salvation. "Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."

Prevenient Grace. Since the Fall, man cannot, by himself, without the moving of "the grace of God, by Christ," have living faith, or "do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God." (x.)

"*Good Works*," though they be "the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins," or avert God's judgment : yet are they evidences of a lively faith ; and are "pleasant and acceptable to God."

Works of Supererogation. Man cannot, without impiety, pretend to do "voluntary works, besides, over and above, God's commandments," on the plea that he can "do more . . . than of bounden duty is required."

Post-baptismal Sin. "We may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, after we have received the Holy Ghost ; and, by the grace of God, we may arise again, and amend our lives." Save, then, for the "unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, . . . the grant of repentance is not to be denied [by the Church] to such as fall into sin after baptism."

Perfection. "If we say, we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "Therefore they are to be condemned, which say, they can no more sin as long as they live here."

"*Predestination to Life* is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby . . . He hath constantly decreed, by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ, . . . to bring them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation." "His Spirit working in due season, they, through grace, obey the calling ;" are "justified freely," and "made sons of God by adoption." But it "is a most dangerous downfall for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination ;" because thereby "the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into" vice.

4. HEAVEN, HELL, PURGATORY.

Heaven. "Who [Christ] . . . came down from Heaven." "He ascended into Heaven." "They that have done good shall go into Life-everlasting."

Hell. "He [Christ] descended into Hell." "They that have done evil [shall go] into everlasting fire."

[*Purgatory.* (xxii.)]

5. ETHICS.

Ceremonial and Moral Laws. "Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, does not bind Christian men; . . . yet . . . no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral."

Personal and Social Ethics, [Homilies. (xxxv.)]

6. APPOINTMENTS AND ORDINANCES.

Congregational Worship. [Use of the vernacular. (xxiv.)]

[*Conditional ceremonial adjustments.* (xxxiv.)]

The Ministry. Unless "chosen and lawfully called to this work by men who have public authority . . . to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard, it is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation."

[*Consecration and ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.* (xxxvi.)]

[*Deposition of evil Ministers.* (xxvi.)]

Marriage of the Clergy. "It is lawful for Bishops, Priests and Deacons (as for all other Christian men) to marry, at their own discretion."

Confirmation.

Excommunication and Penance. Whoever, "by open denunciation of the Church, is rightly cut off from the unity of the Church, and excommunicated, ought to be taken, of the whole multitude of the faithful, as an heathen and publican, until he be openly reconciled by penance, and received into the Church by a judge that hath authority thereunto."

[*Pardons, Invocation of Saints, and Image and Relic-worship* denounced. (xxii.)]

7. SACRAMENTS.

(a) THE TWO PROTESTANT SACRAMENTS.

"*There are two Sacraments* ordained of Christ, our Lord, . . . Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord." They "be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather . . . sure witnesses, and effectual signs, of grace, and God's good will towards us ; by the which he doth work invisibly in us ; and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him."

Their reception. "In such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation : but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation."

Their ministration. "The effect of Christ's ordinance" is not "taken away by the wickedness" of evil ministrants : "forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's ; and do minister by His commission and authority."

[*Five Romish Sacraments* repudiated. (xxv.)]

(b) BAPTISM.

"*Baptism* is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened :—it is also a sign of regeneration, . . . whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church ; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed ; faith is confirmed, and grace increased, by virtue of prayer unto God."

Infant Baptism. "The baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained by the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ."

(c) THE EUCHARIST.

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another : it is rather a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death : inso-much that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ ; and, likewise, the cup of blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation . . . in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ. . . . The Body of Christ

is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner," through faith.

Ministration of both kinds. "By Christ's ordinance and commandment, both the parts of the Lord's sacrament ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike."

[*Adoration of the Host*, also *Sacrifice of the Mass*, denounced. (xxviii., xxxi.)]

8. CIVIL POLITY, &c.

The Monarch. The Queen has the chief power in her dominions: and to her appertains "the chief government of all estates of this Realm, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil;" but "not the ministering either of God's Word, or of the Sacraments." (xxxvii.)

[*No Papal jurisdiction in England.* (xxxvii.)]

Authority of the civil Magistrate.

Loyalty and obedience.

Rights of Property. "The . . . goods of Christians (as touching the right, title, and possession of the same) are not common."

War. "It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars."

The Oath. "A man may swear, when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity; so it be done . . . in justice, judgment and truth."

Death-penalty. "The laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death, for heinous and grievous offences."

To clear the way for farther progress, it may be expedient to make a few remarks upon the sense and scope of certain terms which belong to the theological vocabulary.

The word *orthodoxy* is generally used in these pages to express acknowledgment of the received tenets of Christian belief, as understood in their literal and popular sense. But until the truth of tenets shall be immovably established, there can be no fixed standard of orthodoxy. It has been

shrewdly said that the orthodox person is one who agrees with your own opinions ; and that every one who disagrees with them is heterodox :—indeed orthodox and heterodox are interchangeable terms, the choice between which depends upon the point of view of the person applying them. In this conventional sense the saying is as true of Churches as it is of individuals. When the world fully awakes to the conviction that perfect standards are unattainable, orthodoxy will be swallowed up in universal charity.

The sharp line of separation which has commonly been drawn between things called *religious*, and things called *secular* ; and which an attachment to creedal formulæ has done much to create and perpetuate ; has been fruitful of injury to the interests of true religion. Religion has too often been divorced from life, and confounded with theology. Theologic notions pertain to the intellect ; and have only an indirect connexion with religious convictions. The former are speculative : the latter are practical. *Theology* is the realm of *belief*, expressing itself in *creeds*. *Religion* is the realm of *faith*, expressing itself in *life*. Theologies change with every transformation effected in the laboratory of thought ; and are centrifugal, tending toward diversity and discord. Religion is essentially unchangeable ; and is centripetal, tending toward unity and harmony. Herder wisely advises to “flee religious controversy, as you would the plague : for it is impossible to dispute about what religion is. It is as impossible either to deny or affirm it by discussion, as to paint the mind, or hear light.” And he adds :—“True religion cannot exist without morality : and true morality is religion, under whatever form it may show itself.” Much to the same purport writes Channing :—“Moral perfection is man’s only true and enduring good :

and, consequently, the promise of this must be the highest which any religion can contain."

There is a prevalent misconception as to the import of *doubt*,—a sentiment which, too often, and without discrimination, is regarded as the *fons et origo* of all sin; and thus as, in itself, the dread evil. This is because doubt has almost invariably been exclusively identified with hesitation in accepting articles of belief assumed to be indubitable and binding; forgetting that such articles present real difficulties which at least justify caution in accepting them. A poet well says,—“Who never doubted, never half believed:” and another,—“There lies more faith in honest doubt (believe me) than in half the creeds.” Doubt of this kind is eminently wholesome, springing, as it usually does, from allegiance to a native instinct of truth. The doubt that is dangerous is that which arises in an unstable moral nature, confounding the distinctions between right and wrong; and causing the subject of it to hesitate in, and to swerve from, the fulfilment of duty.³

While this is not the place to define the antithetic words *good* and *evil*; nor to discuss the nature, source, offices and issues of the attributes which they express; attention should be drawn to the fact (not sufficiently realised) that perhaps they have a relative quite as frequently as an absolute application. The same thing or act may, at one time, or to one

³ So deeply is the fallacy of the vital import of right belief in creedal matters ingrained in the teachings of the Church, that so judicious and accommodating an author as Bishop Burnet writes thus on the matter :—“A necessary distinction is to be remembered between articles of faith and articles of doctrine: the one are held necessary to salvation; the other are only believed to be true. . . *Articles of faith* are doctrines that are so necessary to salvation, that, without believing them, there is not a federal right to the covenant of grace.”

person, be good (in the sense of being expedient) which, at another time, or to another person, may be evil (in the sense of being inexpedient):—expedient or inexpedient, that is, with regard, not to temporal conditions, but to divine ends.

Touching principles of interpretation :—while there can be little room for difference of opinion concerning the practical parts of the Articles, it must be confessed that it is easier to see within what limits the more speculative portion of this body of teaching is presented, than it is to be sure that we apprehend the ideas intended to be conveyed by its principal passages. The Articles and the Creeds have shared the fate which must ever attend endeavours to express in verbal forms the high themes, and the subtle abstractions of theology. No creed—be its terms ever so simple—can escape this condemnation to failure; even though its very simplicity (involving a proportionate vagueness) may seem to invite consent. On the other hand, the more complex the structure, and the more pronounced the attempt at precision, the more numerous are the controvertible points: for, in such matters, it is vain to dream of securing a faultlessness of phrase which shall command universal acceptance. Hence it is not surprising that many of the Articles have been variously understood; and have received interpretations ranging from the most literal and rigid to the most subtle and elastic: the more so, for that, in their construction, there has generally been a studied avoidance of particulars, and a preference for terms expressive of general ideas. This breadth of conception—in a word, this indefiniteness, easily passing into ambiguity—encourages free licence of individual treatment: “An Article,” Bishop Burnet says, “being [often] conceived in

such general words, that it can admit of different literal and grammatical senses, even when the senses given are plainly contrary one to another." And he proceeds to state his opinion that "where the Articles are conceived in large and general words, and have not more special and restrained terms in them, we ought to take that for a sure indication that the Church does not intend to tie men up too severely to particular opinions, but that she leaves all to such a liberty as is agreeable with the purity of the faith." Valuable, however, as liberty of interpretation may be to the individual, it is clear that, for our present purpose, whenever it may become necessary to consider any separate tenet upon its merits, such latitude will seldom be admissible: for the hypothesis submitted for discussion presupposes a distinct conception of "the tenets of Christianity," without which it would be impossible to establish definite forms of negation, such as it may sometimes be expedient to postulate, as a condition-precedent to our conclusions. It is not intended to assert that the dogmas of Christianity have no esoteric sense; or that this is of inferior value: but if such be admitted as an alternative, or to the exclusion of the exoteric sense, it would be mere waste of time to proceed any farther with our undertaking: for the two methods of interpretation are often pregnant with very different, and even opposite issues. It appears, however, that there is little room for choice in the matter; for, in "His Majesty's Declaration," prefixed to the Articles, it is authoritatively ruled that "no man shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside any way; but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof: and shall not put his own sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article; but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense." This, then, is the principle of interpretation

which the writer feels himself bound to adopt,—not only for the sake of loyalty to the conditions imposed, but also by reason of its practical urgency,—whenever it becomes necessary to take account of particular tenets.

The ultimate end of this discussion is to find an expression for the positive or negative value of Christianity to mankind in terms of the changes which may be expected to take place on its withdrawal. If, then, we are to be in a position to foresee these, we must first know, not only what its doctrines and institutions are, but what influence (if any) they now exert in the regulation of personal and social life. This is the reason why it has been deemed necessary to devote considerable space to this phase of the discussion; the main object being ever kept in view; to the exclusion, as far as possible, of side-issues.

The mode of treatment cannot, of course, be the same for all the divisions of the subject; the more recondite being on a very different footing from the more experimental. As the former class is the only one concerning which any serious misconception is likely to arise, it will receive the principal share of our attention; and, as a preliminary, it will be proper to lay down the general rules by which they are to be judged. Every dogmatic statement, worthy of acceptance, must bring with it one or both of two kinds of vouchers. Either its source must be unimpeachable; or it must contain within itself the proofs of its own validity; or it may be fortified in both of these ways. In either case, it is duly certificated; and becomes a portion of our heritage in the good and the true. That such contributions to the common stock of human knowledge, if properly received, must bring blessings to the race, has only to be stated, to be at once accepted by all who reason in first principles, as a truth

having the force of an axiom. On the contrary, every such dogma, not thus accredited, ought to be regarded as only *sub judice* ; unless, hopelessly bankrupt or positively mischievous, it deserve a more summary fate. This will make it clear why, where the application of these principles is involved, the reader will find decisions delivered *ex cathedrâ*, after a manner which, otherwise, might be regarded as begging the question. But, in truth, no other method is here possible. Libraries of polemics have been written on these topics ; and the world is still almost as far off as ever from being of one mind, even on points which are pronounced to be essential. Such matters, indeed, can at last be properly weighed only by an intuitive faculty capable of divining the secret of every cult : for they have but an indirect and imperfect connexion with the acquirements of the scholar who, too often, is very weak in this higher judgment—this innate perception of quality and fitness. “These things are hid from the wise and prudent,”—the learned and conservative,—“and are revealed unto babes,”—those who, in simple confidence, obey their spiritual instincts, not yet fatally warped by traditional teaching, or paralysed by the poison of a false philosophy.

Whatever may have been the genesis of the theological systems which have prevailed in the world, it appears to have been their lot, sooner or later, to pass through that phase in which they dominate the masses by the force of authority. Some (Islam, for example) have been from the very first, and still remain, established on this foundation. There is good reason for believing that others, whose origin is lost in the obscurity of a forgotten past, have, in their early

stages, been either popular, in the truest sense of the word, or simply systems of nature-myths. But in such cases, the knowledge (or supposed knowledge) which once was within the reach of the many, afterward became concealed in mysteries which it was the chief function of a sacerdotal caste to guard from profanation ; until eventually the meaning of the mystery was lost, and ignorance screened itself behind an array of formal sayings and ceremonies. The more closely the history and teachings of Christianity are studied, the clearer is the evidence that it too has passed through some of these stages. How it originated, we may not now pause to inquire :—that is still a subject of angry controversy :—but it will hardly be disputed by any one (least of all by the most orthodox) that, whenever its tenets are challenged, the appeal ultimately is to that divine sanction by which it is supposed to be authenticated.⁴ Let us cursorily examine the validity of this title.

All human knowledge and belief respectively rest on two kinds of authority, *viz.*, that possessed by divine truth, and that claimed by, or accorded to, human exponents. Divine truth, like a rock rooted in eternity, fears no examination, risks no exposure, cannot be shaken. Being infallible, its authority is absolute ; and the happiness of man is involved in obedience to its dictates. Assumed authority, on the other hand, depending on the attainments of a fallible creature, is worthy of acknowledgment only to the extent of the exponent's possession of truth. So far, however, the authority should not be regarded as attaching to the person, but as

⁴ Spiritual submission to the utterances of the past is the *conditio sine quâ non* of the very existence of Christianity as a theological system : for to the degree that these utterances are discredited or disproved, to that degree is the authority of the system impugned or lost.

inherent in the truth itself. Hence all human claims, whether individual or corporate, to exercise control in theological matters must necessarily be presumptuous, and ultimately injurious,—as well to those who usurp the leadership, as to the masses.

Guided by the principle enunciated in the preceding paragraph ; and, for the moment, referring only to the dogmatic part of the subject, it is easy to see that a conditional reply, in general terms, might at once be given to our querist. To assume that the tenets of Christianity are disproved, is hypothetically to grant that these tenets embody no portion of divine truth : and if so, their condemnation could hardly fail to be an unmixed blessing to the world. On the other hand, if Christianity be a divine religion,—though its tenets may be contradicted, they cannot be disproved. Just so too, if an intermediate hypothesis be held, that in Christianity divine truth and human error are mingled.

It will, however, not do to rest content with the mere statement of this dilemma : we must continue to develop the question methodically. To this intent, it is of prime consequence to examine the character of the credentials of Christianity, and to consider its intrinsic merits, that we may the better be able to discern whether it is altogether divine, or altogether human, or partly one, and partly the other. This portion of the inquiry will be divided into two sections ; the first touching the validity of the sources whence it is alleged that the doctrines have been derived ; the second exhibiting the nature and tendency of the doctrines themselves. Then, after considering the conditions of circumstance which regulate results, we shall the better be able to judge what the effect would be, primarily, on individual, and, secondarily, on social life : for, as society is an aggregate of individuals,

so the influence of any agent upon society is the resultant of the lines of influence which it exercises upon the units of which society is composed.⁵

Whence, then, have the tenets of Christianity come? And what is the force of the plea that has been set up in favour of their assumed infallibility? The Articles refer to "Holy Writ" as the fount of their knowledge, in a manner which plainly implies the acceptance of a belief in the complete and exclusive illumination of the persons by or through whom the Bible was written: for, say they, "whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith." This is but an echo, in another form, of the familiar *dictum*, "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." What is the real value of the claim, thus put forth, that any book should be the first and last court of appeal in these matters? The ordinary idea attached to revelation implies that it is something exceptional: for it is supposed to have been vouchsafed only occasionally, and to particular persons. To hold, as the orthodox do, that its era and primary channels were restricted to a very small portion of the vast period during which this globe has been inhabited by man, and to a score or so of individuals long since departed, is to narrow the scope of revelation to a dangerous degree. It is to ignore that continuity in the providential government of the world, manifesting itself (with such minor modifications as may have

⁵ Although the main drift of the argument turns upon the view which, *regarding Christianity as a product rather than a creator of the spirit of its era, gives it a secondary and very subordinate place as a factor in the regulation of life and the development of the race*, it seems necessary to take some account of the influence which is undoubtedly exerted even by its subjective elements.

been necessary to meet the varying needs of the ages) in a divine uniformity of method, which alone approves itself to our higher perceptions of fitness and harmony. The message of God to the soul of man is essentially the same now as it has always been. There have been no exceptional periods of divine illumination, severed by an impassable line from other non-illuminated periods: but every age is furnished at first hand with the light which it needs. Precious though the Bible may be, as a literary legacy from the ancients,—it is really amazing to think how a number of detached treatises, composed by, or written through the instrumentality of various persons, at intervals during several centuries,—commonly supposed to extend to nearly two thousand years; and, by successive accretions, grouped together in divers forms, under very diverse auspices, (sometimes by Councils marred by most ungodly strife); and the canon of which still lacks the *imprimatur* of the whole Christian Church; could ever have been worshipped as the very Word of God; and regarded as the supreme and only authority in matters of faith and life.⁶ An article so constituted certainly can have no claim to possess the attributes of the abiding Spirit which is able to lead into all truth. If it were indeed the “Book of God,” the proof of so astounding a fact ought to be overwhelming. It should bear the same internal evidence of its divine authorship as may be found in every work of the Almighty hand: for in these, the more closely they are examined, the profounder is the wonder of their unfathomable mysteries; the more manifest the traces of a wisdom and power, in the presence of which the human spirit is con-

⁶ The same claim for verbal inspiration of the strictest kind is made on behalf of the Veda, in India, by the orthodox; and, likewise, on behalf of the Koran, by orthodox Moslems.

strained to bow down in silent adoration, confessing its own impotence. Were it not for the force of traditional teaching, no thoughtful person could suppose other than that every book, being the product of human agencies, must necessarily at least reflect the idiosyncrasies of the writers, be limited by their shortcomings, and be marred by their frailties. But much more than this:—Whatever may have been the notions about inspiration formerly current, the close study which has now, for many years, been given to psychology, comparative mythology, kabbalistic doctrine, the symbolic systems of secret societies, popular traditions, history, philology, geology, &c., has thrown a flood of light on the principles of the composition, the methods of the production, and the assumed integrity of ancient “Sacred” records; and has demonstrated (though such proof should not have been needed) that the only authority which any Scripture can possibly claim is that which is wielded by the truths it may enshrine. Its utterances are certainly not authoritative, merely because they happen to be found therein. The one point of importance is,—are these utterances true? The appeal, then, in every case, is to the knowledge and judgment of the reader, whose capacity for estimating the value of any teaching will be measured by the degree of his enlightenment.

Who is to decide in such matters? When the appeal is made to individual opinion, the responses are various and discordant; because the truly enlightened are but few; while the many remain under the spell of the influences amid which they have been trained. So the Church, yearning for a substantial unity, and aiming to secure the maximum of uniformity, steps forward to claim the right to pronounce judgment: and, having done so, expects her children to accept her *dicta*. But what is the Church? In this imme-

diate connexion, "the Church" is that small body of selected persons, supposed to possess adequate knowledge and matured experience, who, sitting in General Councils, or in smaller companies, to define the realm of orthodoxy, or to formulate articles of belief, adopted such tenets as found acceptance among them. This is, however, nothing more than a slight extension of the exercise of individual judgment, subjected, on the one hand, to the restraints of corporate caution, by which the risk of extravagancies is minimised, and, on the other, to the spirit of compromise, by which the intuitions of the higher minds are neglected, in favour of the average perceptions of mediocrity, faithfully reflecting the spirit of the age. There can be but one result: every decision will betray the ecclesiastical warp; and conventionalism will strive hard to bar the way of progress. The whole affair is, indeed, only an evasion of personal responsibility and a yielding of undue deference to the judgment of a chosen few of our own or of some former period;—with no assurance that they were wiser than ourselves. Is it, then, wonderful if, to those who do not call themselves true children of the Church, she has become but as a voice crying in the wilderness?

The materials out of which creeds are constructed are of three principal classes,—historic, dogmatic, and ethical. These—though sometimes closely inter-related in a creedal system—may otherwise be regarded separately: and the veracity or validity of each may have to be established by a distinct line of evidence.

Records claiming to be historic, not being verifiable by the human consciousness, but appealing to the laborious research of the scholar, (who, guided by dim and dubious lights, at the best feels his way but falteringly), on that

account have no claim whatsoever, under any circumstances, to be made a foundation for matters of faith. They are nothing—can be nothing—but mere narratives of events that may or may not have occurred; shown to be probable to-day; perhaps shown to be equally improbable to-morrow. Truly a foundation of shifting sand, ever exposed to the assaults of the searching winds of criticism, and the angry waves of controversy! A miserable bottom whereon to build a system of faith which is to save mankind! And yet it is on such a basis that the “cardinal facts of Christianity”—the immaculate conception, Divine incarnation, life, miracles, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and bodily ascension of the Second Person of the Trinity—are made to rest. There are, indeed, some who claim to have reached absolute conviction on these matters by interior processes. Such testimonies, however, can be of value only to the individuals; and of diminished value even to them, if they know something of the nature of subjective illusions, (which frequently should rather be called hallucinations), and of the liability to self-persuasion by which man is so generally beset. But even if capable of being completely accredited, circumstantial events, from their very nature, must remain valueless as matters of faith: belief in them cannot be obligatory on any one: and their real import to humanity must, in any case, depend, not upon the events having occurred, but solely upon the actual modifications which they may have induced in the conditions of human environment,—of which man, being himself the subject, may take personal cognizance. The truth is too little apprehended that, for the people of any age, the Past, *quâ* past, is dead;—not in the living forces which it has transmitted to posterity; nor in the issues which have thus been generated: not in the lessons

it is capable of teaching to the patient student who, with reverent and painful industry, strives to rescue from oblivion, and to read the riddle of a few fragments of its all too scanty records:—but dead, as to the exercise of any peremptory power over posterity. Then, in this sense, and once for all, “let the dead Past bury its dead.”

The dogmatic tenets may be subdivided into two classes;—those which involve a historic element; and those which are wholly metaphysical.

The chief, and a typical instance of the former is the doctrine of the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. Another is the doctrine of the Fall. If no Divine Mediator ever took flesh in this world, then, the tenets clustering around, and deduced from, the gospel-record lose their support. If Adam and Eve be mythical characters, then, where is the proof of the “original righteousness” from which “man is very far gone”? It is an axiom that vital matters of faith must rest on firm foundations. Only such doctrines, therefore, as have this sustained assurance can avail as incitements to the highest religious life.

The metaphysical dogmas embrace such matters as the being and nature of God; the personality and offices of the Trinity; human corruption and helplessness; sin, and its deserts; the terms of the relations between God and man; salvation and damnation; atonement and justification; grace and sanctification; good and dead works; perfection, predestination, &c. Having no historic reference, they do not stand upon the same footing as the two classes before-mentioned. These, (which are, either wholly or in part, circumstantial in their character), as we have already seen, appeal for verification to a criticism which is merely external. Those (which refer to the natures and activities of spiritual

beings and forces) cannot claim intelligent credence until the understanding is satisfied by such evidences as appeal to the consciousness, experience, or reason of each individual.

But with farther reference to the class of tenets now under review, it should be remembered that the alternative is by no means limited to the mere acceptance or rejection of the sayings of men of other times, alleged to have enjoyed special illumination: it is immensely complicated by the difficulty—not to say the impossibility—of knowing the sense which was attached to their words by these ancient writers, or (according to the theory of plenary inspiration) by the Divine Author.

With regard to the ethics of Christianity:—while we are at present specially engaged in considering the question of derivation, as affecting authority, it will suffice to note that they do not lean more upon Scripture than upon the moral instincts of man developed by experience and regulated by reason.

This is as far as it seems needful to go in canvassing the credentials of Christianity: and we may now proceed to consider, one by one, the nature and tendency of its teachings and institutions.

At the head of the former comes that leading one, the God-idea. The Christian attempt to define God begins by postulating an “incomprehensible” being, “without body, parts, or passions,”—only to proceed immediately to divide Him into three parts or “Persons;” to endow one of these with a human body of flesh; and to attribute to another the passion of wrath. The popular idea of individuality attached to the Persons of the first Article (of which the Athanasian

Creed, with its scholastic subtleties, may be regarded as in great part an expansion) is professedly denied ; and perhaps it would generally be claimed that the term was intended to express determinate powers, or forms of manifestation, somewhat in accordance with the primitive sense of the Latin word *persona*, a mask : but as the same word "Person" is used in the second Article with a strictly literal application to "Christ, very God and very Man," we are at liberty to conclude that it was intended to be understood in the popular sense. Indeed it is not too much to say that, only by a juggle of words, can it be made to appear that a tri-personal being, so conceived and described, is other than three gods. Though the charge is always repudiated, there can be no doubt that multitudes of people, including many clergy of good standing, do really worship three deities. They confess by their acts what they deny with their tongues. They confess it by the earnestness with which they insist on the distinct personalities of the members of the Trinity ; by the warm debates which have been held as to whether prayer should be addressed to the one or to the other ; and by their acceptance of the popular doctrine of the vicarious atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ, which is built upon this view of the Divine constitution. Such an impeachment could not be made if words no longer usurped the place of ideas ; if "believers" were less satisfied to champ the husks of empty and misleading phrases ; and sought more sincerely to feed upon the grain of substantial truth. Though the Church professes to derive its God-idea from the Bible,—particularly from the New Testament,—whoever will be at the pains to collect, and honestly to compare the pertinent texts, (not excluding those, now generally allowed to be spurious, which appear to support the doctrine

of the Trinity), can hardly fail to be convinced of the impossibility of framing a consistent image from the materials found therein. But whether immediately derived from the New Testament or not, the genealogy of the conception can be traced back, through varying forms, to a much earlier age, and to a (so called) heathen parentage. We are, however, not now concerned with the entrance of the conception into the human mind; but only with the inquiry how the idea of God, once originated, took a definite form; and how that form received its subsequent modifications. The truth is (though few see it clearly) that, *as far as human apprehensions go, God can never be anything more than an idea*; for man is totally unable to conceive of the Supreme Being in any other than a merely subjective form, conditioned by the capacities and qualities of the creature. The character of a people is reflected in that of its deity. Thus the God of the high Calvinist is a lean and partial pedant, whose government is a stern and narrow travesty of divine justice. The abstract impersonal theism of the East is the product of the contemplative and subtle habit of the Asiatic mind; as the concrete personal theism of the West is of the practical talent, and executive faculty of Europe. The Jehovah of the Hebrews—that intense and persistent, but narrow, exclusive, and self-conscious people—if he reflected the national virtues, was also deeply tinged with the national failings, until the intuitions of the better prophets raised the ideal to a loftier level. It is recorded in the Bible (and, in a sense, truly so) that man was made in the image of God. It would be equally correct to reverse the statement; and to say that man has ever created his god in his own image. In the words of Herder—“We know nothing higher than humanity in man. Even when we imagine angels and gods,

we imagine them as ideal, higher men." Böhme expresses himself still more strongly:—"God," says he, "dwells in man. Let us but seek to know ourselves: and, when we find ourselves, we find all." The Church, discerning, in a measure, that the manifested God only can be recognised by us, points to Jesus Christ as the perfect realization of it. It comes, then, to this:—to ask, whether it is safer for puny man to dogmatize upon "Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being;" presuming to define his constitution and functions, and ending, as such attempts must always end, in making to himself an anthropomorphic *eidolon*, which he calls his god; or, withdrawing his gaze from the inscrutable and fathomless firmament, to reverence and study the divine that is in himself, and in his neighbour, and in all that he sees; and to live in obedience to that? So long as this is done, it is of secondary consequence what is the external form of the God-idea;—whether it be that of the polytheist practising his primitive cult, localizing his conceptions, and filling his pantheon with deified personifications of the powers of nature; that of the pantheist who, expanding, unifying, and refining the same idea, worships the Divine Spirit immanent in the universe; that of the monotheist, contemplating a Being—not himself—abiding in a personal form; or that of the positivist and atheist, setting the human race on the throne of deity. It is the distinguishing mark of the wise man to take thought chiefly of the essence of things; and to care comparatively little for accidents of form. He immediately sees that whichever of these, or other alternative aspects of the God-idea, is held, it is a matter primarily of the intellect only—not of the heart, whose affections may be as healthy, and may burn with as pure a flame, in one who holds heterodox views, as in one

who accepts the orthodox one. Note, however, the necessity of being very careful, when revolving these high questions in the mind, to distinguish accurately between things which, though they may seem to be the same, are yet essentially different. The science of the constitution of God is one thing: the doctrine of His character, and His moral relation to His creatures, is quite another. If it is comparatively a matter of indifference what views we may now entertain with respect to the former; it is, on the contrary, most important that our conceptions as to the latter should be worthy. Swedenborg held that a true theology is essential as the foundation of a true life. But, if the former be subjective, as the writer has urged, it would be more to the point to say that a true life will beget a true theology. An oft-quoted passage from one of the Gospels is much to the same purport:—"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." It is of the greatest consequence to society that it cultivate the ability to conceive the loftiest views of the Divine nature; and that it gain the most rational convictions on the supremely important questions involved in the mutual relations between man and his Maker: but this cannot be done without banishing the crudities and incongruities which disfigure Christian theology, bewildering and distressing multitudes of souls, and hindering the progress of true religion, both within Christendom and among the peoples whom we attempt to instruct in divine things. Thus, it may be concluded that the disappearance of the Church ideal of the object of worship would leave the ground clear for the uprising of a new ideal, more worthy of its subject, and of man; which, at the same time, would be an evidence of the advance of humanity, and, by reflex action, would incite to the attainment of a still higher level of aspiration and of action.

The existence of a personal Devil being a cherished tenet of Christianity (though but one reference to him—and that an incidental one—is to be found in the Articles), it should be noted, in passing, that the various conceptions of this personage—which have played a very grotesque *rôle* in ecclesiastical mythology; one which has by no means ceased to be in vogue—are but forms of subjective personifications of the Spirit of Evil. As God's gaoler, the dread of the Supreme, which has been felt by those who were conscious of their shortcomings, has been chiefly directed toward his all-powerful agent. The sentiment has certainly been effectual in restraining from the commission of sin; though the motive being ignoble, but little of real and permanent value would be likely to result from such negative goodness. The utility of such a lever to the moral life has been well expressed by a worthy octogenarian clergyman who remarked to a friend,—“If I had not believed in the Devil's existence, oh, what a life I should have led at twenty-five!” The system which makes use of such machinery for effecting the reformation of man is really more adapted to a gross and violent age, than to our progressive and aspiring one. The former can, perhaps, hardly be successfully reached without occasionally playing upon the lower motives by instilling a dread of legal penalties:—in short, it is negative in character; and restraint is the characteristic of its discipline. The latter tends more and more to rise out of this crude and unworthy condition; to cherish higher aspirations; to think less of rewards or punishments; and to love, for its own sake, that which is “lovely, and of good report;”—in short, to be positive and free. If it is unnecessary—even embarrassing—to postulate the personality of God; still more unnecessary—even harmful—is it now to postulate the person-

ality of the Devil. If, in the former case, the real thing is to acquire a knowledge of the nature and influx of good, and to practise it intelligently, can it, in the latter case, be less essential to understand the nature, influx, and outcome of evil, so that it may be intelligently shunned? To those who realize this, it will be a matter of indifference whether or no there be any over-lord of Hell; and, as useful knowledge spreads, the devil-legend will expire from sheer inanition, together with all the hideous crew of miseries to which that legend has, directly or indirectly, given birth.

Intimately interwoven with the theory of the character of God, is the theological theory of man,—of the bent of his nature, his relations with the Deity, his condition here, and his prospects hereafter. Man, it is said, inherits a corrupt nature, inclined to evil; is unable by himself to do a good work; and deserves the damnation of God. From this position he can escape by only one resource,—faith in the name and merits of Jesus Christ, accepted by the offended Deity as the believer's substitute. This faith attained,—though his nature still remains corrupt,—he is justified and saved; and—though without merit—he is now capable of doing works accounted good for the sake of his Saviour: although freedom from sin can never be predicated of man. What a gulf there is between such speculative notions of original and personal sin, and that broad view which regards as sinful all human acts which tend to disturb the universal harmony! The discerning mind, if loyal to itself, must inevitably revolt from the former doctrine, which seems to “darken counsel by words without knowledge;” and can find satisfaction only in the latter. All that we can be said to be competent to believe of the matter—and all that we need to believe—is, that acts called sinful, sooner or later, in this world or

the next, beget results which are felt to be painful. Men, judging from appearances, have supposed that the effect of sin is to excite the Divine wrath. But what is the wrath of God? This, and nothing more. It is the impression received by the human soul on feeling the inward or outward consequences of real or apprehended sin. It is purely subjective: and to make it objective is to fall into the same kind of error as that of the ignorant savage who, when the sun is eclipsed, or is obscured by a cloud, or has set below the horizon, thinks that he has withdrawn in anger, or that he is dead. A man with strong and healthy vision may look at the sun, and only be dazzled; while, to inflamed eyes, the exposure would be productive of torture. Böhme wisely says:—"In God no anger is manifested; but a burning love only:" and again, with a subtle perception of the subjectivity of the passion falsely attributed to God, he asserts that "in Heaven He is called *God*; and in Hell He is called *Anger*:" for "every soul is its own judgment."

"Can man, by searching, find out God?" If not, then how crude must be man's theories as to his relations toward the Supreme; and their bearing on his lot here, and his destiny hereafter! Nor do the statements upon this subject, which the Church has formulated, derive any support from the fact that the Church professes to draw them from "Holy Writ;" for why should "holy men of old" be infallible guides to us in matters of doctrine, more than in matters of history? They may, or they may not, have been more enlightened than we: that, however, is not the important question. The point for us, in these, as in all such matters, is to ask,—What do they teach? Is it true? Of that, every one, according to ability, must exercise the right to judge; and is answerable only to conscience for the reply.

When, however, it comes to carrying these teachings into effect, it is reasonable that the claims of the individual should generally be subordinated to those of society, where the former threaten to come into conflict with the latter.

On a review of the orthodox pronouncements about "Christian men" and "the wicked," "good works" and "dead works," righteousness and sin, we are confronted with the fact that the one is always put in absolute and indiscriminating opposition to the other. Such antithetic use of terms is, indeed, legitimate and intelligible, when intended to express philosophical generalizations : but no one, not blinded by theological sophistry, for a moment supposes that it is possible to regard any human being as either good or bad, without due qualification of the sense and scope of those words. Because dogmatic Christianity, *in its logical outcome*, recognises no mean between being orthodox, and doing good—with everlasting life as the reward ; and being heterodox, and doing evil—with condemnation to everlasting fire as the penalty ; it has no adjustments to bring it into working harmony with practical existence, in which good and evil shade off, the one into the other, by imperceptible gradations ; and intermingle, in every possible proportion, in the individual man. It is in these points, which so closely touch the workings of our spiritual nature, our aspirations, hopes, fears, destiny, &c., that Christianity especially fails. No religious system can fully satisfy the needs of mankind which, so lost in speculative subtleties, refuses to tie itself down to the facts of humanity. How much smoother progress is Christendom likely to make when, disentangling itself from the dialectical net, it shall awake to a full recognition of such rational and intelligible truths as these ;—that good and evil are, to a large extent, relative, with endless grada-

tions in both quantity and quality; that works springing from a good living motive (which is the same thing as being in possession of grace) are, to the doer, good works; while those springing from an evil motive are, to the doer, evil works: dead works being those performed in a mechanical and perfunctory manner:—in short, that, in so far as a man has good dispositions, which he cultivates, and causes to bear fruit, he is good; while, in so far as a man has evil dispositions, which he nourishes, he is evil; and that his deserts are in accordance with his state! There can be no doubt in the minds of many who have observed the working of the orthodox theories, that they are very apt to promote self-deception and hypocrisy: while a natural and just doctrine of life must inevitably furnish the best conditions for cultivating the moral nature, satisfying the highest aspirations, and generally securing the welfare of the race.

Let us pause here for a moment to note that, though full of metaphysico-legal notions as to his deserts God-ward, the Christian system hardly has a hint as to the constitution of man. Such as there are may be found in incidental references to his “body, soul and spirit;” and in passages of the Creeds insisting upon “the resurrection of the body,” in accordance, it is supposed, with the teachings of the Bible;—a doctrine which has no moral bearing; and which, being quite unverifiable, and altogether incredible, is made a matter of faith.

The virtues,—faith, love, hope, humility, temperance, truthfulness, purity, patience, &c., being such as are not characteristic of Christianity alone; but more or less recognised in every other worthy form of religious teaching;⁷

⁷ As an example, may be quoted “Zoroaster’s system, in which the moral code, comprised in six words, ‘good thoughts, good words, good deeds,’ was comprised again in one word, *Asha*, righteousness. A

and their exercise being but the practical observance of that morality which appeals to the best feelings and is justified by the experience of the whole race ; they cannot be regarded as susceptible of disproof. If the practice of these virtues were entirely to cease, it would need no prophet to predict the dire consequences that would quickly ensue. That these are cultivated as much as they are, is due, not to the existence of any written law of the Church, or any other body, but partly to the spontaneous activity of the corresponding sentiments in the human mind, and partly to the exigencies of the public weal.

The institutions of the Church—which, by the hypothesis, are supposed to be abolished—provide for the celebration of public worship ; for preaching “the Word,” and ministering the sacraments ; for ordering confirmation, solemnizing matrimony, visiting the sick, burying the dead, &c. ; together with the ordination of ministers, and the exercise of certain acts of discipline. Not being of equal private or public value, they cannot be taken *en bloc* ; but, for the most part, must be treated separately.

Various are the motives which induce people to go to church. Some do so from habit ; others to pass the time, or to see and be seen : many go because it is fashionable, and to please the minister : some, again, from fear of public opinion, man’s only hope of salvation was to be in his own self-righteousness. He was to be rewarded hereafter, not according to his belief in any particular religious dogma, but according to the perfection of his thoughts, words, and deeds ; of his benevolence, his benediction and his beneficence. He was gifted with free-will. He was to be judged according to his own works. The soul that sinned was to die ; and no sacrifice or substitute was to be accepted. Nor was salvation or religious merit procurable through self-mortification.”—Prof. Monier-Williams on “*The Religion of Zoroaster and the Parsees*,” in the *Nineteenth Century*, Jan. and Mar. 1881

or from superstitious dread of supposed judgments on account of wilful absence : while, in many churches the attraction is found in the facilities offered for indulging æsthetic tastes. These (perhaps with others not mentioned) are unworthy motives ; and, if they were the only ones that could be adduced, the abolition of church-services would leave people very much where it found them,—free to devise other means of gratifying their sentiments. But, happily, these are not the only incitements. There are some which are seasoned with more or less of the element of good ; though sometimes the motive may be a mistaken one ; as, for example, the feeling of a certain degree of responsibility, as a member of a congregation, for supporting its meetings by personal attendance, or on account of the desire to set a good example ; to fulfil an apprehended duty toward God ; or to offer the incense of personal worship to him ; or to seek spiritual food and strength from the teachings and offices. Now the motives referred to in the first two clauses of this latter category—praiseworthy as they may be—have no necessary connexion with the institutions of the Church : and, if these were to cease, the resources of society would afford abundant opportunities for practising those small acts of self-denial which are presumably involved. Hence, farther criticism may be limited to the three remaining clauses.

“As everybody likes to be honoured, so people imagine that God also wants to be honoured :” * and thus “it is [commonly] imagined that we are to go to church to do some service to God ; not to get some good from Him.” † But God cannot ask our poor worship for His own sake, “as though He needed anything.” “Men forget that the fulfilment of duty toward man is the only honour they are able

* Kant : *Critic of Judgment*.

† F. W. Newman : *The Soul*.

to do to God.”* “They will not understand that, when they fulfil their duties to men, they thereby fulfil God’s commandments: that, consequently, they are always serving God, so long as their actions are moral: and that it is impossible otherwise to serve Him.”† “Apart from moral conduct, all that man imagines he is able to do, in order to become acceptable to God, is mere superstition, and religious folly. If once a man has come to the idea of a service which is not purely moral, but is supposed to be agreeable to God himself, or capable of propitiating Him, there is little difference between the several ways of serving Him. For all these ways are of equal value. Whether the devotee accomplishes his statutory walk to church; or whether he undertakes a pilgrimage to Loretto or Palestine: whether he repeats his prayer-formulas with his lips; or whether, like the Thibetan, he uses a prayer-wheel:—it is quite indifferent.”‡ What worthier worship then can man pay than to those principles of good and truth which are the highest abstractions of which he can form any conception? And what better service can he render, than to exemplify those principles in his dealings with his fellow-men, and, let it be added, in his treatment of the brute-creation? Indeed, it is not going too far to assert that positive benefit would result from a withdrawal of much of that misdirected adoration, which expends itself in honours paid to an ideal Being; and a transference of its spirit of reverence to the manifested Deity in universal nature.

But it must by no means be supposed that the comments in the preceding paragraph cover the whole of the ground of divine worship. There is another phase of it, in which

* Kant: *Critic of Judgment*. † *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

the spirit of adoration ascends to God, not with the vain intent of doing Him honour, but out of pure child-like gladness and thankfulness of heart, under a sense of the beneficence of Providence. Certainly, to many who are moved to chant the hymn of praise from their hearts and lips, the public services of the churches do offer facilities, useful, because periodical, for sustaining the activity of the spirit. So far, then, their cessation might, for a time, be followed by a temporary fall in the spiritual barometer of those who are most easily affected by the atmosphere of piety there engendered. But this deprivation would only make it the more necessary to encourage the cultivation of that habitually happy temper of soul which springs into activity upon every apt occasion, making sunshine within and around.

If it be true that the chief advantages of appointed religious assemblies are to be found in their regular recurrence; in the encouragement they give to engagement in religious exercises; and in the sympathetic contagion which, generated by numbers, tends to stimulate personal piety; then these exercises are so far profitable. The degree to which they are so, depends partly on their character, and partly on the state of the worshippers. There is, however, so much in most of the accustomed orders of worship that is cut-and-dried and vicarious, that the result can hardly fail to be other than to train up congregations to a flaccid kind of indolent habit, not very conducive to healthy spiritual growth. The principal danger attaching to these exercises is that they have a great tendency to become formal and perfunctory. "A liturgy, like the old Law," says Mr. F. W. Newman, "is admirably adapted to those whom Paul calls 'the children of the bond-woman,' who have not yet received the spirit of adoption;" but its forms are too mechanical,

too little vital and spontaneous, to meet the needs of those who have attained to maturity of knowledge, and to personal freedom in spiritual matters. Hence, such "aids to devotion" are doubtless destined to fall into disuse when people shall have outgrown the feeling that they need them. It is in the religious as it is in the bodily life:—the perfectly strong and healthy man does his daily duties easily and profitably; needing neither tonics to brace, nor stimulants to spur jaded energies; nor additions to the accustomed dietary to support them.

We are on much the same ground, whether we speak of the public exercise of prayer or that of praise: and many of the remarks concerning the latter, in the last paragraph but one, will also apply to the former. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed:" and most is it prayer when unexpressed; because the act of framing and uttering the words absorbs some of the force which otherwise might be thrown into the living aspiration. The essence of this spiritual act is in great danger of evaporating when it comes to be embodied in human speech. Those prayers are the truest which are the spontaneous pantings of the pilgrim plodding along the pathway of life, carrying out his mission here in the seen, with aspirations toward the unseen. Also "*laborare est orare*." To such persons (and all who are devout are at times numbered among them) public prayer is, by comparison, an exercise with less of the element of life. Whether it be conducted according to the stereotyped forms of the Church of England; or whether it be an individual utterance from a nonconformist pulpit; the congregation do but follow: and if they unite in the spirit of the act, it is with an effort that needs to be continuously sustained. The observance of set times, if it tends

to lessen neglect, does not necessarily favour fervency ; and is hardly compatible with that spontaneity of desire which is, at once, the stimulus to, and the vital breath of the most effectual prayer. Mr. Newman has aptly remarked that “forms of prayer may, with much truth, be called useful in the inverse proportion to the development of spiritual life.” What, then, is the conclusion to be drawn? Is it not that, as spiritual life develops, the use of forms of prayer will be proportionally abandoned? And that it is even desirable that this should take place?

But if public prayer has its drawbacks, much more has public preaching. Hear again what that keen observer, Mr. Newman, says on this head:—“Occasional listening to a preacher will always be more or less coveted : but it is very hurtful to imagine that we all, always, want ‘a regular ministry’ to teach us. Nothing is more desirable for those who are already fully fledged, than that each should be driven out from the nest to seek his own food by soaring through God’s wide heaven, instead of huddling together, as now, with closed wings, on the flat earth, gaping for morsels of meat killed and cooked [alas ! too often killed, and always cooked] by another.” To the same effect testifies one who himself was an impassioned preacher : *—“Sermons are crutches:—I believe often the worst things for spiritual health that ever were invented.” Why do we find the multitude of serious church-goers so attached to, and so dependent upon, such periodical exercises and ministrations? The answer is this :—It is because they are so little conscious of continual contact with that spiritual world which, it is imagined, is specially opened to them during “the services of the sanctuary.” If people were more truly enlightened to

* F. W. Robertson.

understand the facts of their human nature ; the object of their sojourn upon earth, its privileges and responsibilities ; and to perceive the thinness of the veil which hides the incorporeal worlds from their ordinary sight ; they should grow independent of such instrumentalities, which would soon be felt to belong rather to the undeveloped past than to a period of progress. The case is pithily put in a sentence of Böhme :—" The holy man hath his church about him everywhere, even in himself. The Holy Ghost preacheth to him out of every creature." But it may here be objected that though this may be true of a select number of advanced people, it takes little note of the masses who have not attained to this self-poised position. To this it may be replied that the number of those capable of understanding this higher life is much greater than is commonly supposed. It is recruited, without regard to social rank, and with little reference to intellectual attainments, from the learned and the illiterate, civilized and savage, alike ; from the orders of clergy, as well as from the laity ; from members of religious denominations, and from those of no denomination ; from theists, pantheists, positivists, and atheists ; from Christians, Buddhists and Moslems :—in fine, wherever and in whomsoever the outward is subject to the inward. As to others, the light and aid which they might need would be supplied to them—more effectually than now, because more timely, spontaneously and wisely—by persons naturally qualified, who would find public addresses less effectual than private counsel and personal influence. This is not a fanciful anticipation : for the best work of reformation which is being done to-day, whether it be that organized by Parliament, the Churches, or other philanthropic bodies, in the form of boards of health, school-boards, free libraries, savings-banks,

benefit-societies, asylums, training-schools, reformatories, temperance and provident societies, mothers' meetings, blanket and coal-clubs, home-missions, &c. ; or whether it be that unorganized work unostentatiously done by independent philanthropists ; would, there is good reason to believe, be equally well done if the din of ten thousand pulpits were to cease ; and if the cause of the needy were left to be pleaded by those who might specially have it at heart.

Touching sacramental doctrine :—the words of the Article pronouncing the sacraments to be “sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us ; by the which He doth work invisibly in us ; and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in Him ;” if taken alone, seem to be too indefinite to warrant an assumption that they were intended to have any significance more mystical than that which they would naturally bear as symbols. But if, for farther explanation, we turn to the beginning of the office for the baptism of infants, and there read that “none can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate, and born anew *of water*, and of the Holy Ghost ;” and still more, if we consult the Catechism for confirmation, and find it therein laid down that “Baptism and the Supper of the Lord” are “generally necessary to salvation ;” it is quite excusable if we find therein distinct traces of a superstitious regard for this sacrament ; or at least traces of that which would justify it in one so minded. And, turning to the Communion-service, there is something perilously near it in the passage referring to the communicant as coming “to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food :”—to say nothing of the use of the phrase “holy mysteries,” which is applied to this ceremony. It will, however, hardly be necessary to press this aspect of the

question too closely ; partly because its bearings can be made sufficiently intelligible without resorting to argument on so abstruse a point ; and, partly, because the charge would be repudiated by a large section of the English Church ; as well as by the entire body of nonconformists who have adopted the use of the same sacraments.

Baptism may be regarded merely as an appropriate significant act, marking the union of the subject with the Church ; being “a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men, [by reason of it being known by report that they have submitted to this ceremony, and have joined the visible Church], are discerned from others that be not christened : [and] also a sign—[not a means]—of regeneration, . . . whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the [invisible] Church.” The baptismal rite must be viewed differently, as it is administered to adults or to infants. In both cases, it is an appropriate and beautiful symbol of the spiritual process called, in mystical language, “the washing of regeneration ;” and if the subject be a person of mature years, who is conscious of having experienced a “change of heart,” it is quite easy to see that submission to the ordinance—as it would distinctively mark an irrevocable confession of the inner experience—may, in many cases, help to sustain the individual in an after-life consistent therewith. On the other hand, it is conceivable that if such a ceremony were abolished, some few, without its support, might be more liable to fall into backsliding. But it cannot be, that the true interests of any should hang upon the occurrence or non-occurrence of an act of profession connected with any external rite : the more so, that its celebration (save in extreme cases) depends upon the presence of a qualified ministrant. Therefore, the urgency

with which submission to this rite is often pressed, and the refusal of Christian burial to the unbaptized, savour strongly of something which it is hard to distinguish from idolatry : from which sin the sooner the Church is purged the better.

The baptism of infants differs in several respects from adult-baptism. In the case of the former, if no superstitious meaning be attached to the ceremony ; but if it be regarded merely as marking a vicarious acceptance, in trust, by the sponsors, of the spiritual conversion of the child ; it is absurd—as committing the infant to that which, on reaching years of discretion, it may repudiate. If it be regarded as imposing on the god-parents the duty of feeling a special responsibility for the child's welfare, the result can hardly be other than beneficial, if the god-parents are wise, as well as good. But surely this responsibility toward the young will be felt by such as are qualified to undertake this office, apart from the ceremony of baptism, so long as there is a general recognition in society of the duty of training up the rising generation in the way they should go.

The sacrament of "the Lord's Supper" differs from that of baptism in that it depends for its chief *raison d'être* upon the verity of the Gospel-story, and upon the doctrines clustering about the alleged facts of the Divine incarnation. If these were to give way, nearly the whole of the significance which is usually imported into the rite would be lost ; and it would be reduced to a merely symbolic act, representative of the reception of the spiritual bread of life and the wine of spiritual truth.

It is reasonable to suppose that the stronger the grasp of realities, the looser is likely to be the hold of symbols on the attention of mankind : for who that has seized the substance will care any longer to run after its shadow ? Hence,

the neglect of such rites need not indicate religious indifference: on the contrary, it may be a sign of spiritual health and strength,—of the attainment of that which has induced a ceremonial indifference. And thus, in that it is desirable that man should advance from a state of tutelage to one of maturity; it is also desirable that these ceremonial observances, which belong rather to the former state than to the latter, should become obsolete;—as, doubtless, they, with many other kindred things, will in process of time.

The abolition of the rite of confirmation would hardly leave room for any other office which, while retaining its advantages, should be free from its defects. Among the former—which confirmation shares with other critical rites—it may be noted that sometimes the candidate is durably impressed with determinations toward virtue which are, as it were, sealed and secured by the act. Among the latter, it will be found, in most cases, that the dogmatic teachings, which it is considered indispensable to acknowledge, are thrust prematurely upon the attention of youth, generally incapable of forming a just judgment upon them. Were all of these doctrines such as must inevitably be approved by every well-balanced mind; or, were nothing else required but assent to a few wholesome ethical propositions; there might be a positive advantage in emphasizing, after this manner, their conscious reception: not, however, by imposition of episcopal hands:—an act introducing into the ceremony an element of superstition.

As baptism claims to make the infant “regenerate—grafted into the body of Christ’s Church,” and “received into the congregation of Christ’s flock;” an act which is sealed by confirmation; so excommunication removes the former member from both open and spiritual fellowship:—not, be it observed, on account of an evil life, but because

of the culprit's "open denunciation of the Church." Now, if such denunciation were uttered in the spirit of an enemy, the person concerned would voluntarily break the bond which had hitherto united him to the Church; and might be allowed quietly to depart. If, on the other hand, such denunciation were to proceed from the lips of a churchman desirous of reforming it, and, to that end, not sparing its shortcomings; ought not such an one to be listened to and borne with as a brother? In any case, it would surely be no matter for regret if a ceremony, so presumptuous and uncharitable, were abolished; and if the "heathen man and publican" were dealt-with on purely moral principles, without any special reference to that ideal body "the Church." Christian fellowship only with Christians should, and will, give place to a larger fellowship with all whose characters invite it.

The ordination of ministers, as a means of securing apostolic succession,—without which that lineal continuity of authority, which is an object of prime solicitude in the Church, could not be maintained—would become a ceremony robbed of its principal intention, if the origin of Christianity were not that which it is stated to have been in the New Testament. But, even apart from this contingency, the act of ordination involves the recognition of professionalism in the ministry of the Church. Whether the advantages which flow from thence are a sufficient compensation for the evils which it begets, must be a matter of opinion. All that it seems meet to say on the subject here is that, on a broad view of it, the ecclesiastical practice is most closely in accord with those things which have had their use in times of immaturity (not yet extinct), but which are destined to develop a freer and more spontaneous life, when all who pose as spiritual leaders will have to justify their assump-

tions by the possession of true qualifications ; of which the learning of the schools—very valuable though it is—will be an element of but secondary consequence.

It is needless to pass any opinion on the question of the marriage of the clergy, who, of course, under the assumed conditions, would cease to exist as an order.

Passing now from matters exclusively moral and ecclesiastical to those pertaining to civil government, we enter upon entirely different ground. There is no necessary connexion between the two. The Christian system may fall without drawing after it the fall of a governmental system. But as the Church of England has assumed a definite relation to "the powers that be," it is necessary to inquire what changes therein, actual or possible, would be involved in the fall of that Church. To this end, we must first see what is the present relation between the governing and the ecclesiastical powers. So far as the Articles are concerned, there is only one (the 37th, *Of the Civil Magistrate*) which throws any light upon the subject. Curiously enough, this Article makes no explicit reference to the functions of any other magistrate than the Queen, to whose person there seems to be an ascription of a *quasi* divine right. The reigning sovereign, in whom is vested "the chief government of all Estates of this Realm," must be a member of the National Church ; and is its temporal head, without, however, the power of "ministering either of God's Word, or of the sacraments." It is plain that this politico-ecclesiastical arrangement is possible only in monarchical countries. If the Church were to disappear, the monarchy might remain : but if the monarchy were to be replaced by a republic, the union between Church and State would necessarily be dissolved. That this latter is a contingency which must be faced in the

future in England is evident to all advanced thinkers. The writer holds that monarchies—like much else that has been criticised in the foregoing pages—belong to an immature state of society ; and when their hour shall have struck, they will have to give place to that new political order which, almost everywhere, is being slowly, but surely, evolved in civilized lands.

Of course, after the fall of the Church, there would be no bishops to sit in the House of Peers, where their influence, in recent years, has too often been used to retard useful reforms.

As to the civil magistrates in general, the Catechism supplies information which is lacking in the Articles. We are to “honour and obey all that are put in authority under the Queen : to submit ourselves to all our governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters : and to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters.” Savouring strongly of times when class-distinctions were much more pronounced than they now are ; and when those in power, and “people of quality” were disposed to enforce their authority upon their “inferiors ;” directions couched in such terms are becoming more and more unsuited to our democratic days. Let it be noted that the alternative to this gradation, based upon social position, is not social disorder, but a new social order based upon natural fitness. Then, obedience, instead of being blind and compulsory, when it is proper to render it, will become enlightened and spontaneous ; and there will be a growing indisposition improperly to exact it.

In a few decisive words, the Articles declare against communism. And yet, if we are to accept the example said to have been set by early Christian believers, it cannot be held that the doctrine of community of goods is unchristian. But the truth is, that the question is really one of political

economy and social ethics : so it must always be discussed upon its own proper grounds, without reference to the Church, whose fate will in no wise affect it.

The Articles relating to war, judicial oaths, and the execution of criminals, being merely permissive, need not receive more than a passing notice. As to the first-named, let it suffice to remind the reader of the opinion of some of the most Christian men and women of the day, that war is essentially unchristian. Humanity would certainly lose nothing here, if the voice of the Church were to be stilled. Concerning the second, there is no room for remark in these days when nearly every bar is removed which formerly prevented those who were scrupulous on the point from affirming, instead of taking the oath. Nor is it requisite to discuss the utility or morality of inflicting the penalty of death upon murderers, as it was formerly inflicted upon those guilty of several much less dreadful crimes. It is impossible not to be struck, in passing, with the strong evidence of sacramentalism afforded by the phrase which recognises the title "Christian men" as still applicable to any who may be guilty of "heinous and grievous offences," simply because such may, at one time, have been made members of the Church by baptism.

So far we have been mainly occupied in making a piecemeal survey of the territory of Christianity, and questioning its title-deeds : a formal process which has given occasion, by the way, to offer such timely criticisms as might pave the way for a general summation and evaluation of terms and results. But before this can be intelligently done, several important conditions, greatly affecting the solution of the

problem, must be passed in review. Some of these have already been casually referred to in the foregoing pages ; but they demand more complete notice in this, their proper connexion. Others have not yet been mentioned.

When we remember how complex a being is man ; how individualized, and distinctly differentiated, is every unit of the race ; and how largely his lot is fashioned by circumstances ; the difficulty of attempting to predict the state of society that would be likely to supervene on the removal of Christianity will at once be apparent. This would manifestly depend upon a great number of conditions, of which the five following seem to be the chief.

(1) *The rank of the discarded factor ;—whether speculative dogma, ethical maxim, scientific statement, recorded event, ecclesiastical institution, or civil ordinance.* It must suffice here to name the heads of this classification, whose import is noticed in the proper place.

(2) *The diversity of alternatives to either of these divisions, and to their constituent elements.* This diversity is so great, and, if particularly arrayed, would be so bewildering, that it is impracticable to do more than here and there to suggest the simplest and most prominent alternatives.

(3) *The inherited and acquired habits, proclivities, and mental aptitudes of the individual, society, race, or era.* Given any standard of teaching and practice, every individual mind will have its own special relation to it, or to its parts, either sympathetic or antipathetic, depending on hereditary bias, on the mental habit superinduced by education and environment, and on a sense of expediency. A great number of complex considerations are here involved ; the chief of which will presently receive attention. The same remarks are generally as applicable to masses of men as to individuals : though

the former are less distinctly differentiated than the latter. It is equally necessary to take into account the spirit of the age.

(4) *The suddenness or graduation of the process of negation.* If the supposed change were effected somewhat rapidly, the interference with traditional and established modes of thought would produce disturbances much more pronounced than if the change were to be effected gradually. These immediate effects would not only be more pronounced, but would differ somewhat in character, and be much less durable. As an illustration, we may recall the consternation wrought among the orthodox portion of the community, early in the present century, by the revelations of the science of geology, with its corrections of the pentateuchal record, which, it was feared, threatened the integrity of "revealed religion:" also, more recently, by the promulgation of the doctrine of evolution: both of which are now generally received by educated and reflective persons, with something more than equanimity.

(5) *The degree of directness and strength with which different parts of the system appeal to different persons or classes of people.* From this it would result that some individuals and classes would be more directly and strongly affected than others by the failure of Christianity. As somewhat connected with this point, it may be noted that the Articles, as they stand, were drawn up expressly, if not exclusively, for the clergy, whose duty it is to subscribe to them. But a different test of conformity is applied to the laity on admission to baptism or to confirmation. So, by implication, it may be concluded that a layman may be a thoroughly orthodox and good member of the Church of England, (and, *ex hypothesi*, a good Christian), though he may disbelieve every part of the Articles and Creeds not included in the tenets to which assent is required on the occasions referred to.

The preceding systematic discussion of the salient points of the Christian scheme has prepared the way for taking a more general view of the question which, while giving prominence to the principal conclusions, will afford an opportunity of introducing some comments which have not elsewhere found an appropriate place. It may the better enable us to understand the present and prospective aspects of the question, if we take a rapid review of the natural stages in the development of religious thought.

As in the individual, so in societies, nations, eras, there is one rule appropriate to childhood and another to maturity ; while the aged know something of the privileges of a position which, in a certain sense, may be said to be beyond rule. One of the most marked and familiar conditions of the state of childhood and early youth (as well as of servitude) is, that it is subject to authority exercised over it by elders or superiors ; and very properly so, if the sway be beneficent, and the obedience be due. "When I was a child, I spake as a child ; I understood as a child ; I thought as a child : " but, in fulness of time, this state of tutelage passes away ; and the youth graduates into manhood, with right of self-guidance, and full individual responsibility. "When I became a man, I put away childish things." Just so with tribes, nations, and churches. Now theology, the world over, is yet very much in the childish stage ; for the churches, with few exceptions, remain fettered by ecclesiastical bonds which have greatly hampered human thought in the past by compelling it to cast itself exclusively in antiquated moulds ; to reverence the utterances of ancient writers as the *ipsissima verba* of God himself ; unhesitatingly to believe in the historical integrity of the Scriptures ; and, on pain of punishment for disobedience, to accept the doctrines which have been deduced therefrom.

The first step in the course of a healthy spiritual progress is taken when a suspicion is aroused that it is unfit for an intelligent being to worship any book, or to appeal to it, as to an infallible oracle, whereby all truth is to be discovered, and every doctrine established ; and when, as a consequence, a diminished value is placed upon creeds and "confessions of faith." "*C'est le premier pas qui coûte :*" and this first step taken, there is nothing to arrest future progress but obstacles interposed by old habits of thought instilled by education, or imbibed by association. Some will darkly hint that "*Facilis descensus Averni :*" but the warning is beside the mark, unless it can be made manifest that the new departure is retrograde or downward—away from the light, and toward the darkness. It may be hard to part with darling illusions of childhood ; to doubt the absolute veracity of lessons learned at the mother's knee : but the pilgrim has claimed his franchise ; has begun to assert his legitimate independence ; has entered on the upward path ; and may soon cast away the crutches on which he has been accustomed to lean ; and walk forth, trusting in God.

Many never get beyond this first step. These, indeed, have sipped the new wine ; but yet with a feeling akin to fear lest poison should lurk unsuspected in the cup. The past still retains much influence over them ; and traditional notions have not yet been quite cast aside. But, under favourable circumstances, this position is gained, only to become a point of departure for a higher, where, for the first time, it is fully recognised that "wisdom is the principal thing ;" and it begins to be seen that nothing, whatever its pretensions to sanctity, ought to be allowed to stand in the way of its attainment. Inquiry, then, being active, it is soon discovered that those tyrannous tenets that have caused the ceaseless wranglings by which the churches have, un-

happily, been cursed ; that have set brother against brother, and turned friends into enemies ; that have sent martyrs to the stake, and there, with lurid fires, have shut out the divine light from human eyes, and the warmth of divine love from human hearts ; are nothing but æry fabrics spun by the curious ingenuity of other times ; and imposed on the unreasoning acceptance of after-ages. Let them go, unmourned, unregretted ; sure that this not too happy world will be the better and the brighter for their departure. And so, as he wends his way onward and upward, the chains which had fettered the limbs of the pilgrim, having been burst asunder, are finally allowed to drop off ; and he steps forth, joyous and free, to swell the ranks of those who are ready to exclaim with that gifted woman* who had received her best lessons in the school of her own deep experience :—

“ Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men’s hearts : unutterably vain :
Worthless as withered weeds ;
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main.”

Christianity may hypothetically be assumed to disappear in one of two ways ;—either suddenly, and at once, or gradually, by a process of natural decay. It has been pointed out that the proximate changes would not be the same in the two cases. In the former, the immediate consequences would be well-marked : in the latter, the moral and social conditions developed concurrently with the decline of Christianity, and measured at the time of its extinction, would indicate that still greater changes had been effected during the period of transition ;—greater, because time would have been allowed

* Emily Brontë.

for their evolution ; and yet similar to those which, given the time, would eventually be developed from the other condition.

Let us first summarily dispose of the former case. As this alternative is a purely hypothetical and impossible one, the prognosis, which must be as hypothetical, will be practically valueless. However, it must be given. Setting aside ethics, for reasons before alleged, and confining our attention to creeds and institutions, which have much in common, it is easy to foresee that those who have been accustomed to listen to the voice of the Church as though it were the voice of God, and to depend upon its ministrations for their spiritual meat and drink, would pass through a period of great mental distress. Not having been trained to the habit of immediate reliance upon Providence, they would, for a time, be as sheep having no shepherd ; and—former guidance being withdrawn—the ruling love of each would rapidly assert itself, and fashion the course of every individual life. Some would give way to despair ; others lapse into indifference : a few would seek to replace that which they had lost by a more trusty substitute ; while a large number of decorous, but somewhat negative persons, weak in moral fibre, or ill-instructed in the philosophy of life, would break loose, if the restraints imposed upon them by that which is commonly miscalled religion were removed :—a proof, when this occurs, that their former propriety was external, unreal, and in a measure hypocritical. As for the great majority of people, to whom Christianity is, at the most, little more than a name, it might safely be anticipated that they would be profoundly unmoved by its fall ; and would continue to think and act in accordance with their accustomed principles and habits. In towns, the abolition of the services of the churches would be much less

felt than in the country : for society would soon supply the lack by instituting other agencies adapted to its needs. The collapse of the parochial system would—at least for a time—leave the villages without that responsible resident influence which, though often unfaithful to its trust, and often exercised tyrannically, has, on the whole,—when it has exhibited in ever so small a measure the spirit of an Oberlin,—been of much use in regulating, civilizing, and elevating, the outlying portions of the population. It is, however, hard to think that, in these philanthropic days, means would not soon be devised for extending to the villages other useful ministrations, touching the moral life of the people, to supplement the intellectual work of the board-schools, now so widely established. A word or two will suffice for the political aspect of the question. To those who know what a sham the alliance between Church and State is, it will be evident that, to deprive the Queen of her authority as the head of the Church of England, and the bishops of their seats in the House of Peers, with other consequent changes, would have no appreciable effect on political life.

Such revolutions, however, require time for their accomplishment : and the fate of Christianity will not thus be decided in a moment, as by the waving of an enchanter's wand.⁸ If it is destined to disappear, the result will be accomplished by natural agencies. There are many indications that the decay of Christianity has not only commenced, but has recently made considerable progress. The mode of

⁸ Kant's opinion on this matter is thus concisely stated. He says :—Religion should be “successively freed from all statutes based on history ; and one purely moral religion rule over all. The veil must fall. The leading-string of sacred tradition, with all its appendices, . . . becomes, by degrees, useless, and, at last, a fetter. . . . The humiliating distinction between layman and clergyman must disappear ;

regarding it is by no means the same as it once was ; and the farther changes which it will undergo will be but developments of those which are now being effected. Therefore, instead of speculating upon the prospects of an unknown and unheralded future, we have but to observe the tendency of the movements which are passing under our own eyes, especially in this country : taking care to note the effect upon those peoples, the world over, with whom the English Church has established influential relations. *The inquiry, therefore, really resolves itself into an attempt to foresee the issue of the process, as it will be indicated by the state of society at the period of the final disappearance of the Christian cult.*

The spirit of the present age is, above all things, critical. Nothing is safe from its scalpel. It puts hoary antiquity, with its mouldy traditions, to the question with the same severity as the newest discovery in physics : and a wholesome determination prevails to accept nothing as true which cannot be verified by reason or experiment. The active cultivation of such a spirit is surely a sign of social regeneration, and an earnest of better things to come. All the best faculties of the mind are therein exercised :—honesty, courage, patience, reverence for truth ;—an added element which distinguishes the scepticism of the present day from much of that of the past. In this pursuit, the work to be accomplished is generally two-fold : first, destructive ; afterward, constructive or reconstructive. Where the site of a new building is encumbered, the rubbish must be removed, before trenches can and equality spring from true liberty. All this, however, must not be expected from an exterior revolution, which acts violently, and depends upon fortune. In the principle of pure moral religion, which is a sort of divine revelation constantly taking place in the soul of man, must be sought the ground for a passage to the new order of things, which will be accomplished by slow and successive reforms."

be dug, and foundations laid for the future structure. But, as both of these processes often proceed concurrently, so they do here; and thus it will, to some extent, be convenient to glance from one to another as we go along.

The assumption on which this Essay is founded pre-supposes the completion of changes which have been noted as now in progress. In treating farther of these, the chief prominence will, in the first place, be given to the work of removal, and its results. In the stirring words of prophecy, it is said that "the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day: and the idols He shall utterly abolish." Even so must it be with the great book-idol which, for so long a period, has bewitched Protestant Christendom, and largely diverted its worship from the living God. When this shall be dethroned (and not until then) the true beauty and dignity which shine forth from its pages will be properly seen, and duly appreciated: then, only, when its message can be freely scanned, and fearlessly assayed, will the dross be distinguished, and separated from the gold. Years ago, that saintly man, (a Scotchman too!), John Macleod Campbell, remarked to a friend,—“I think we shall learn to value the Bible more as we grow independent of it.” He knew the force of a conviction which Böhme (who is once more worthy of being quoted) has embodied in these words:—"The Word which thou shalt learn and understand is nigh thee; namely, in thy mouth and heart. *Thou* art God's formed Word. Thou must learn to read thy own book, which is thyself." As indicating the march of public opinion in this direction, see some remarkable recent confessions by Canon Fremantle (*Fortnightly Review*, March, 1887), which practically yield almost every point upon which orthodoxy takes its stand. Doubtless, in times past, good may have accrued even from the acknowledgment of such

unfounded claims as those which have been set up on behalf of much of the teaching which has been denounced : for the compensations of Providence are often so nicely arranged that man finds a blessing, even while adoring an idol, or cherishing a delusion ; like the infant who, too young to know better, finds its mother its all-sufficient goddess. "The times of this ignorance God winked at," because they were times of nonage : but now, better things are in store, and are being appropriated by an age of growing enlightenment, in which belief in untenable dogmas is being supplanted by knowledge of realities. Old things are passing away ; and all things are becoming new. The veil which has been before the eyes of those unskilled in discerning the inner realities, which hide behind outward appearances, has too long obscured the vision of the true ; and in nothing more sorrowfully than in relation to the designs of Providence. This veil is being removed : and it is one of the most hopeful signs of our times that there is a rapidly growing disposition to find a single solution of the mysteries and perplexities of human lot by regarding them as but various manifestations of the Divine love acting remedially upon human frailty. The teaching of the churches has had very little to do with bringing in this reformation in religious thought. Such movements are wont to originate from without ; and to be acknowledged last of all by the inner circle who might have been expected to lead. But, however derived, this conviction (still too frequently absent from the orthodox teaching of the Church) cannot fail to be the great factor in working the regeneration of the race. The universal fatherhood of God implies the universal brotherhood of man : and when the full meaning of the former shall be grasped, the latter will be within measurable distance of being acknowledged and acted upon as a blessed reality.

The overthrow of the theory of plenary inspiration, of course involves, in one common ruin with it, the fall of everything which has received its title or sanction from it:⁹—not only the paramount authority of “Holy Scripture,” as the “only rule of faith and morals,” but the delegated authority of the Church, as “a witness and keeper of Holy Writ;” with the authority of creeds, as the Church’s formulæ of belief. And so the extinction of bibliolatry, which seems to be imminent, will open the way for an entire modification—nay, an abandonment—of those false and misleading theological views of the aspects and deserts of sin which have hindered man from discerning its true nature, causes, consequences, and remedies; and have led him to take an erroneous view of the meaning of life. Hitherto, he has been hopelessly bewildered by conflicting doctrines respecting moral guilt, its origin, and its penalties, free-will and predestination, atonement and reconciliation, redemption and salvation, sanctification and perfection; and has been the victim of superstitious dread of being sentenced to eternal damnation in the fires of Hell. Instead of wasting his strength in speculating on these things, his efforts, both of thought and deed, will be concentrated and directed into useful channels, to the promotion of the welfare and growth of his own spiritual nature, and the benefit of all with whom he may

⁹ This is the reason why the stoutest sticklers for the orthodox reception of Christianity insist so strongly upon the literal accuracy of the Old and New Testament records. Dean Burgon, in a reply to the before-mentioned paper by Canon Fremantle, says:—“It becomes plain that, without the first three chapters of Genesis, . . . the whole scheme of salvation, as revealed in the New Testament, becomes meaningless and void. To speak more truly, the entire structure would collapse without those earliest chapters,—collapse, and subside into a shapeless ruin.”

have to do. On learning to view them aright, sins will be shunned, not because they are supposed to incur the imagined wrath of God, but because they disturb the harmony of creation, and thus, are maleficent. When this degree of emancipation from spiritual thralldom shall have been attained, such a diminished value will be set on sacramental observances that they will be allowed to fall into neglect; while utilitarian views of the nature of congregational worship, and other institutions of the Church, will remove obstacles to reforms, however sweeping, which may promise to get rid of their defects, while retaining their advantages. In short, there will be full freedom to think and to do whatever may approve itself to a ripened judgment.

But man must have some kind of religious conceptions wherewith to co-ordinate the religious sentiments which he undoubtedly possesses. As these are common to all mankind (though subject to variations in their actual and relative powers and activities) how is it that so many forms of religion are current in the world, separating, instead of uniting, the various branches of the great human family? The answer is simple. These cults are racial and sectarian, rather than universal. All are deficient in certain needful elements: while all are disfigured by useless, and, too often, mischievous ones.

One of the greatest needs of the age—a need which becomes more and more pressing, as the intercourse between peoples becomes more frequent and intimate—is to find some common bond of union, in the highest principles of our nature, which, like an universal language, shall “make the whole world kin” in sympathy as it is in blood. Such a bond would be a mutual religious concord on the moral plane, in unison with a sound system of truth on the intellectual plane, arising out of the ruins of the elder “faiths,” and reconciling them by

eliminating all that is false, while conserving all that is true, and augmenting its volume. It must be *an organic whole*, growing as a tree from its roots ; firmly grounded in the facts of the genesis and destiny of man, his constitution and his environment, with their actions and reactions ; or, to state it in another form, it must be an expression of the rights, duties, and privileges of the individual, as affected by inherited capacities and qualities, place in the social order, the claims of family and of posterity ; and by relation to the incorporeal worlds of intelligent being. Thus only can truth and justice be everywhere firmly established ; all the moral sentiments be fully satisfied ; and the rivalry between egoism and altruism be first regulated, and finally extinguished. When the science of his own nature shall be better understood, man will be able to reform that larger social and political science which is correlated with it ; giving his best energies to the discovery of all truths which have a practical bearing upon the happiness of the race. What though the way be long, and the march but slow ! If each step be assured, and if full use be made of knowledge gained, progress will be steady, and improvement certain ; until society shall gradually have been re-arranged from its very foundations ; by imperceptible degrees shall develop the lineaments of a diviner life ; and shall turn the brotherhood of man from a name into a reality.

This revolution will ring the death-knell of that chimerical artificial unity of ritual and dogma which the Church has so vainly dreamed of creating—oblivious of the fact that such an unity can only exist in a state of very unstable equilibrium, ever liable to be overthrown. At the same time it will encourage a spontaneous drift toward a natural unity, based upon harmony of the inner life, and independent of outward diversities ;—one which will endure while every visible church, with their

paraphernalia of creeds, priests, altars, rituals, and sacraments (relics all of an antiquated order of things) are being silently swept away, to make room for establishing the invisible reign of righteousness upon Earth. Then shall be spiritually fulfilled, in great measure, the glorious prophecy that "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together: and a little child shall lead them." For, let it be added that, though the *science* of the true religion may be as high as Heaven, as deep as Hell, and as broad as the Earth, its life-principles will remain so few and simple that "the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein." The deepest-read in life's experience ever come to this simplicity. Ruskin has remarked that "no religion which cannot be understood by a child is worth a moment's consideration." "Sing me a bairn's hymn," were among the last touching words of one of the grandest men of modern times at the end of a life full of labours and controversies.

It is because Christianity fails to fulfil the necessary conditions that, with other partial presentations of religious truth, it is destined to disappear. It is very far indeed from being an organic whole. It has no science of the universe or of man. It has nothing to tell him about the whence, and very little about the whither, of this short terrestrial life. It throws little light on the mysteries of his earthly lot. If he seek to know the working of the hidden forces by which he is moved, and those which he himself continually propagates, the oracle remains silent, or, at most, speaks reticently and darkly. It presents for assimilation that crude mass of theses—at once illusory and indigestible—which form the most portentous of the two chief divisions of the system, the dogmatic and the ethical, leaving the latter to receive but scant

attention from the wearied and unsettled mind. These are the reasons why Christianity, as a means for the regeneration of the race, must continue to prove, as it has proved in the past, a conspicuous failure ; and why the world will be the better when it shall have given place to a worthier successor.

Although, for reasons which have been given, not strictly within the scope of the argument, it may be well, before concluding, to draw attention to a mode of regarding Christian doctrine which, providing an escape from many of its difficulties, need not be disturbed by any critical change in the *status* of Christianity :—one, too, which is finding increased favour ; and, no doubt, will continue to do so until it shall become general among those who prefer to “ put new wine into old bottles.” This is the attitude of those reflective persons, of conservative religious tendencies, who, finding it impossible to accept, in their literal sense, those portions of the Bible on which doctrines, other than ethical, are founded, and dreading any exposure of errors in their cherished confessions of faith, abandon, one by one, every point that yields to the pressure of an assault ; and seek safety in an escape from the perplexities of an irreconcilable positive creed, by retiring within the shadowy shelter of a philosophical mysticism, formless and impalpable, which, like Milton’s angels in the war with the Satanic hosts, may, with impunity, receive woundless thrusts from adverse weapons. Such a theology may be made to accommodate itself to almost every dogmatic phrase ; and is as far removed from liability to disproof, as it is from fixity of form and tenure. Before this attitude of mind, all the dark spectres begotten by the schools in brooding over Scripture texts are constrained to vanish out of sight as a fleeting cloud ; and Christianity at last shades off to such

fine issues, that it shakes hands with other esoteric faiths, and becomes almost one with them.

At the commencement of this section of the Essay was recorded the opinion that the eventual results of the fall of Christianity, or of that which caused it, would be very similar, whether that fall were prematurely precipitated, or were the deliberate work of natural agencies. If this be the right view, then (making due allowance for the influence of time which graduates changes, and gives scope for the acquirement of new habits) the same prognosis will practically answer for both cases. At this era there is little chance that the tendency of thought will be retrograde. "Forward!" is everywhere the cry: and the reforms of to-day become at the same time the starting-point and the index of those of to-morrow. There is ample evidence that all the elements of this question present to us an aspect very different from that which they bore to our forefathers. The Bible—never so intelligently studied as it is now—is being relegated to its proper place in the regards of Christendom; and its statements are being strictly tested, and carefully appraised. Consequently, creeds are becoming of less and less account; and the influence of the Church is rapidly waning:—a striking indication of which is, that its ministrations are notoriously frequented by a majority (in many cases an enormous majority) of women, ever the most conservative in such matters, and the last to see the dawning of the new light. And so this generation shakes itself loose from a spirit of dependence upon such outward props; and prepares the way for the enjoyment of a still fuller liberty by its successors. Meanwhile, in a sense that is as true as it is unconventional, the waste places of Zion are being built up by the great work of true civilization which, almost everywhere, is being accomplished:—the extinction of ignor-

ance, and the spread of knowledge ; the reduction of inequalities by the elevation of the lowly, and the approximation of classes ; the removal of injustice, and the amelioration of the lot of the poor ; the mitigation of the horrors of war, and the cultivation of a spirit of mercy ; the abolition of the barbarities formerly prevalent in prisons and asylums, and the adoption of humane and rational restorative methods of discipline ; together with a thousand other beneficial reforms, partly anticipating and partly obeying the teachings of that new science of psychology which is slowly arising among us ; and which, when better understood, will prove to be the long-sought key that will open to mankind a new and a brighter realm of knowledge and experience. The love of truth is the salt of life : and, so long as this extensively prevails, society is in no danger of decay. Dark spots there are indeed upon its fair face ; and much festering corruption within : but they who are best able to make a diagnosis of its condition, and to compare it with that which is revealed to us by the records of the past, can hardly come to any other conclusion than that "the good old times" were not so good as our own ; and that these contain the promise of happier days in store for our children and our children's children.

With more especial reference to the cessation of the observances of "the sanctuary," it may occur to many, unaccustomed to distinguish between incidentals and essentials, to ask—How can the flame of religion be fanned and kept alive without a perennial ministration of the accustomed "means of grace" ? Would it not altogether expire, if these things were abolished ? To prove a *non sequitur*, perhaps it may suffice to adduce the example of the Society of Friends, which, for 240 years, has, however imperfectly, been the closest representative of the approaching order of things that has appeared

among the sects. In constitution absolutely free and democratic : with little distinction between its rich and its poor : with the fewest possible outward marks of a church : without creed, ministerial ordination, ritual, forms, ceremonies, or sacraments : its customs brought to an irreducible minimum (that of publicly assembling together at appointed times with spontaneous religious exercises) : its complete organization confined to the orderly administration of its outward affairs, and the promotion of the observance of personal and social duties :—can any one, not ignorant of the matter, say that this Society has fallen short of any other in allegiance to, and in practice of, the higher life ?

No reform—let it progress ever so slowly—can be effected without parturient pains which, though they may not be consciously felt by the leaders of thought, and those in sympathy with them, will raise a continual cry of distress from the timid and the dependent, mourning for the desolations of Jerusalem. But Time, the great reconciler, rapidly heals these wounds of the spirit, and successively opens fresh avenues to a broader and more enduring inheritance in the treasures of wisdom. As the vanguard advances, the rear-guard follows : and so civilization—theological, as well as social, scientific, and material,—marches on over the corpses of past mistakes to ever new conquests, and to a destiny which, at present, can be but dimly foreseen.

“ Our little systems have their day :

They have their day ; and cease to be.

They are but broken lights from Thee :

And Thou, O Lord ! art more than they.”

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